No. 302 / JUNE 1998

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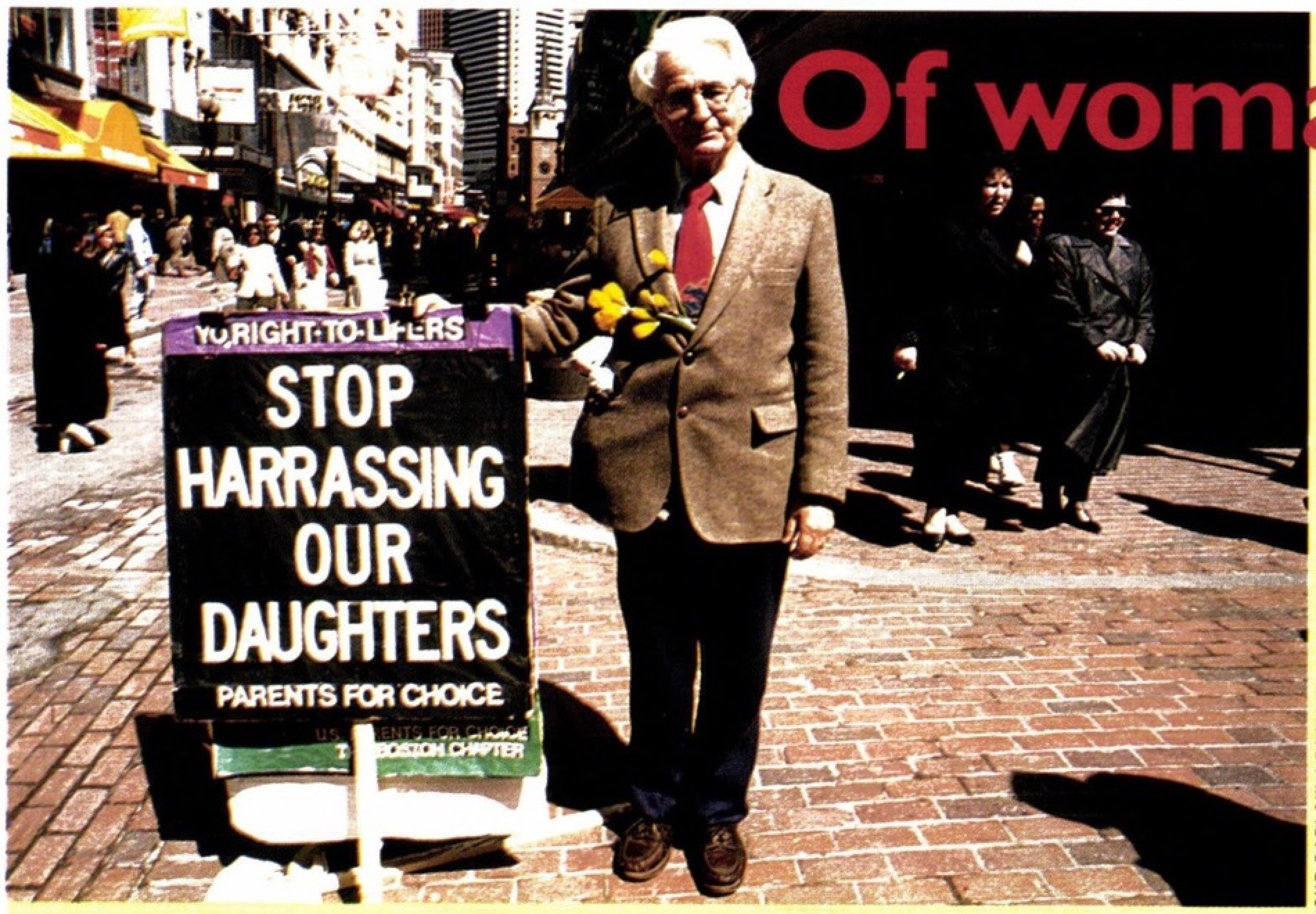

SUE DARLOW / FORMAT

Reproduction is about sex. It is also about blood and pain, birth and death, relationships between men and women, parents and children, and the powerful versus the powerless. Women's wombs have become a battleground as different factions fight it out over contraception and abortion. Does limiting world population justify coercive birth control? This issue tackles the debates head-on. It tells of silent despair and unnecessary death (but also of hope and joy) and calls for a revolution in values.

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- **A MORAL QUESTION: When it comes to abortion, is it possible to sit on the fence?**
- **OUR OWN GIFT: Infertility is not just a problem in the West. Childless women in Zimbabwe are fighting back.**
- **ANOTHER PLANET: What young people think about sex.**
- **A CHASM TO CROSS: South Africa's radical new health policies have to shake off the legacy of apartheid.**
- **MEMORABILIA: Indian writer Shashi Deshpande tells the story of a small box full of disturbing memories.**

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The **New Internationalist (NI)** magazine was founded by Peter and Lesley Adamson in 1970. Together with a range of other publications it is published by New Internationalist Publications Ltd which is wholly owned by the New Internationalist Trust and co-operatively managed:
Accounts: Peter Brown.
Administration: Véronique Szerauc.
Design: Alan Hughes, Andrew Kokotka, Ian Nixon.
Editorial: Vanessa Baird, Chris Brazier, Nikki van der Gaag, David Ransom, Anouk Ride.
Editorial (North America): Wayne Ellwood, Richard Swift.
Magazine marketing: Michael York.
Marketing (North America): Ian McKelvie.
Production: Fran Harvey.
Publications editor: Troth Wells.
Publications marketing: Dexter Tiranti.
Sales and circulation: Jo Lateu, James Rowland.

The **NI** Website:

http://www.newint.org/

The **NI** is published monthly except that the January and February issues are combined into one bumper issue.

The Independent News Collective is an association of radical and alternative publishers. INK publications cover issues of social, political and personal change, issues which are often neglected by the mainstream media. INK enables its members to cooperate on distribution, marketing and publicity. New Internationalist Magazine is an INK member.

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Individuals £24.85 p.a.; £6.85 qtly. Institutions £50. Student/Unwaged £14.70 (please telephone for further information).
Republic of Ireland: 9 Upper Fitzwilliam St, FREEPOST, Dublin 2. Tel: (0044) or (0) 1865 728181.
Fax: (0044) or (0)1865 793152. *Individuals IR £29.85 p.a.; Institutions IR £55 p.a.*
Canada: 35 Riviera Dr., Unit 17, Markham, ON L3R 8N4. Tel: (905) 946-0407 Fax: (905) 946-0410. E-mail: magazine@indas.on.ca
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Individuals $55; Institutions $65 (includes GST).
South Africa: New Internationalist, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough LE16 9EF.
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Rest of the World: PO Box 79, Hertford, SG14 1AQ UK. Tel: (0044) or (0) 1992 822899.
Individuals £29.85 p.a.; £8.50 qtly. Institutions £55 p.a. Please pay in sterling by UK Cheque, Eurocheque, Visa, Mastercard or UK Banker's Draft. Despatch by air only.

Editorial and Advertising Offices

Editorial: 55 Rectory Road, Oxford OX4 1BW UK. Tel: (0044) or (0) 1865 728181. Fax: (0044) or (0)1865 793152.
E-mail: ni@newint.org **Advertising:** Tel/Fax: (0044) or (0) 01372 276233.

Canada/US Editorial: 1011 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M6H 1M1. Tel: (416) 588 6478. Fax: (416) 537 6435.
E-mail: nican@web.net **Advertising:** Tel: (902) 421 7022 Fax: (902) 425 0166.

Australia: 7 Hutt Street, Adelaide, S.A. 5000. Tel: (08) 82321563 Fax: (08) 8232 1887. E-mail: sandyl@newint.com.au

Print and Distribution

Origination: Graphic Facilities, London UK.
Printed on environmentally friendly paper by Warners Midlands plc, UK.
News trade distributor: COMAG Specialist Division, Mercury Centre, Central Way, Feltham, Middlesex TW14 0RX, UK. Tel: (0044) or (0) 181 844 1000. Fax: (0044) or (0) 181 751 2666.
North America. Publications Contract 101400. Postage Paid at Toronto. Periodicals postage paid at Lewiston, NY. (USPS 329-770) US Post-master: send address changes to: New Internationalist, PO Box 1143, Lewiston, NY 14092.

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Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index, CPI CD-ROM, CPI Online, the Canadian Magazine Index, CBCA OnDisc and the Alternative Press Index.

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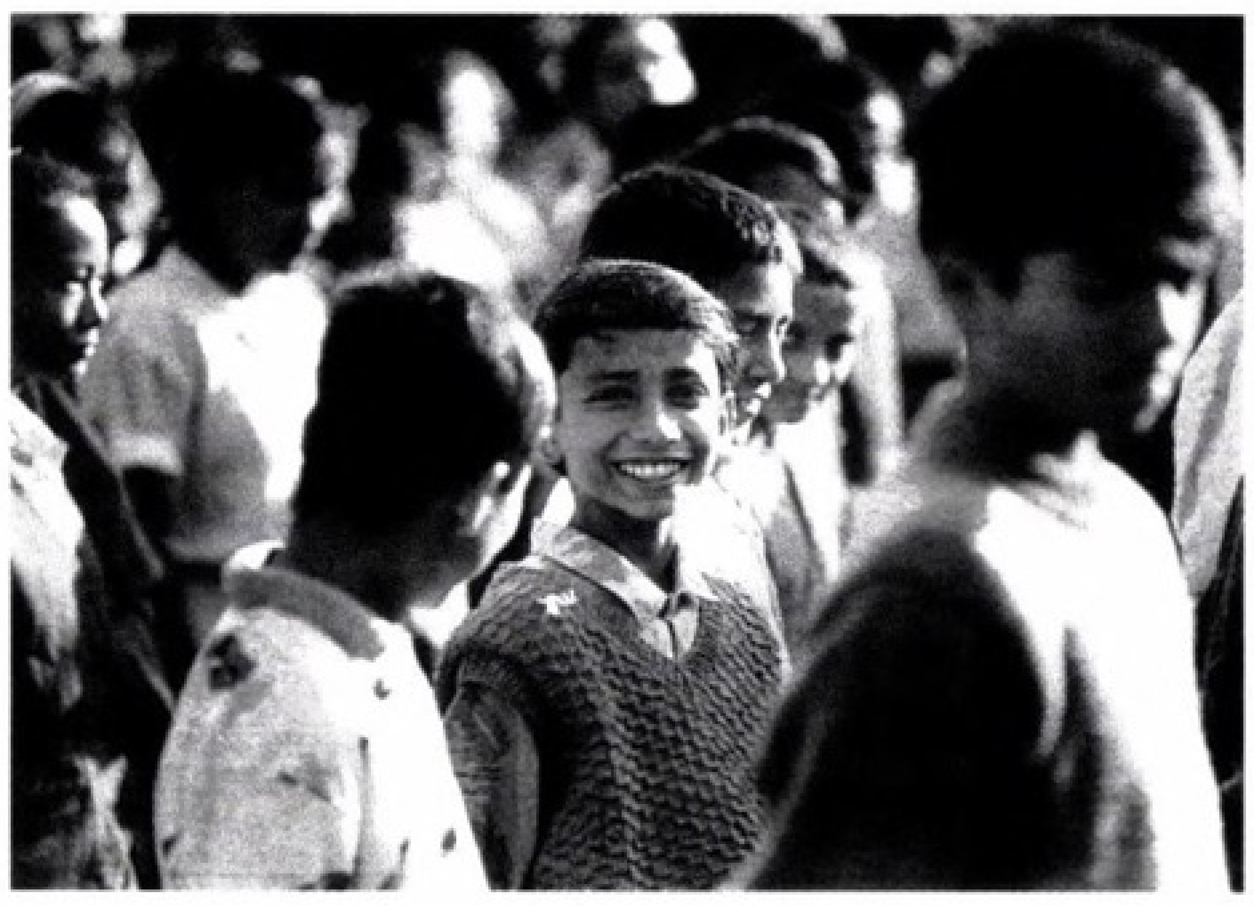
ISSN 03050 9529



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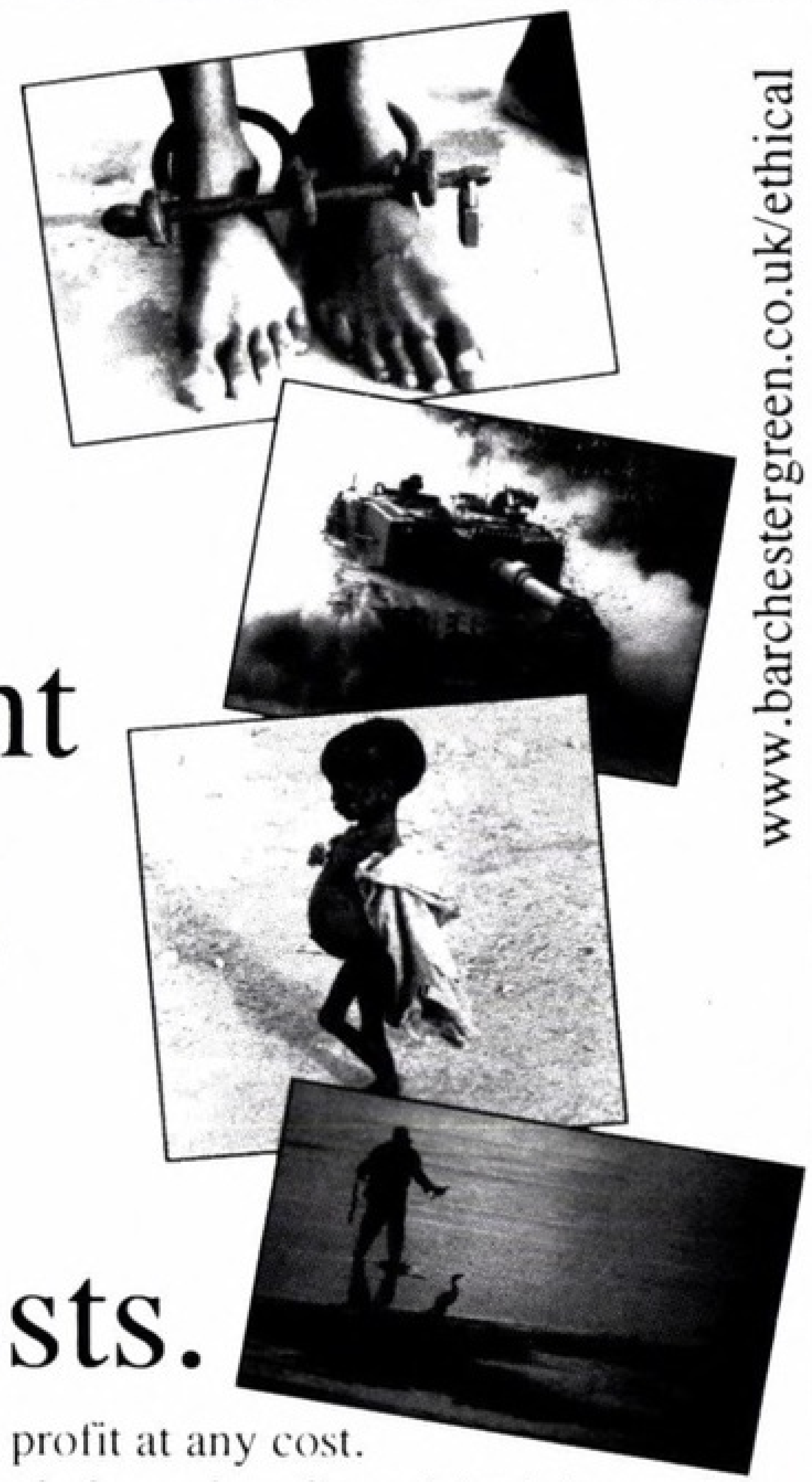

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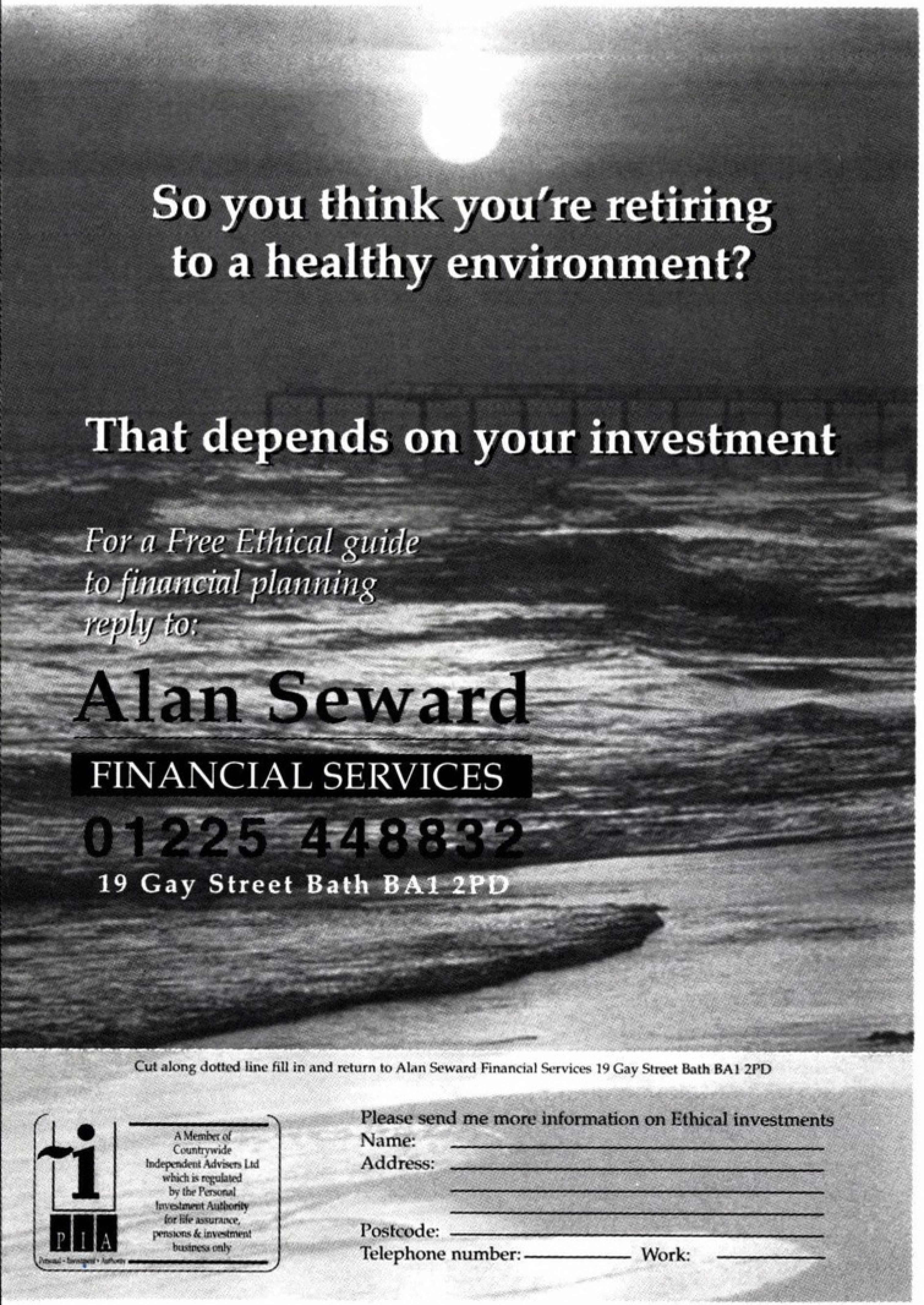
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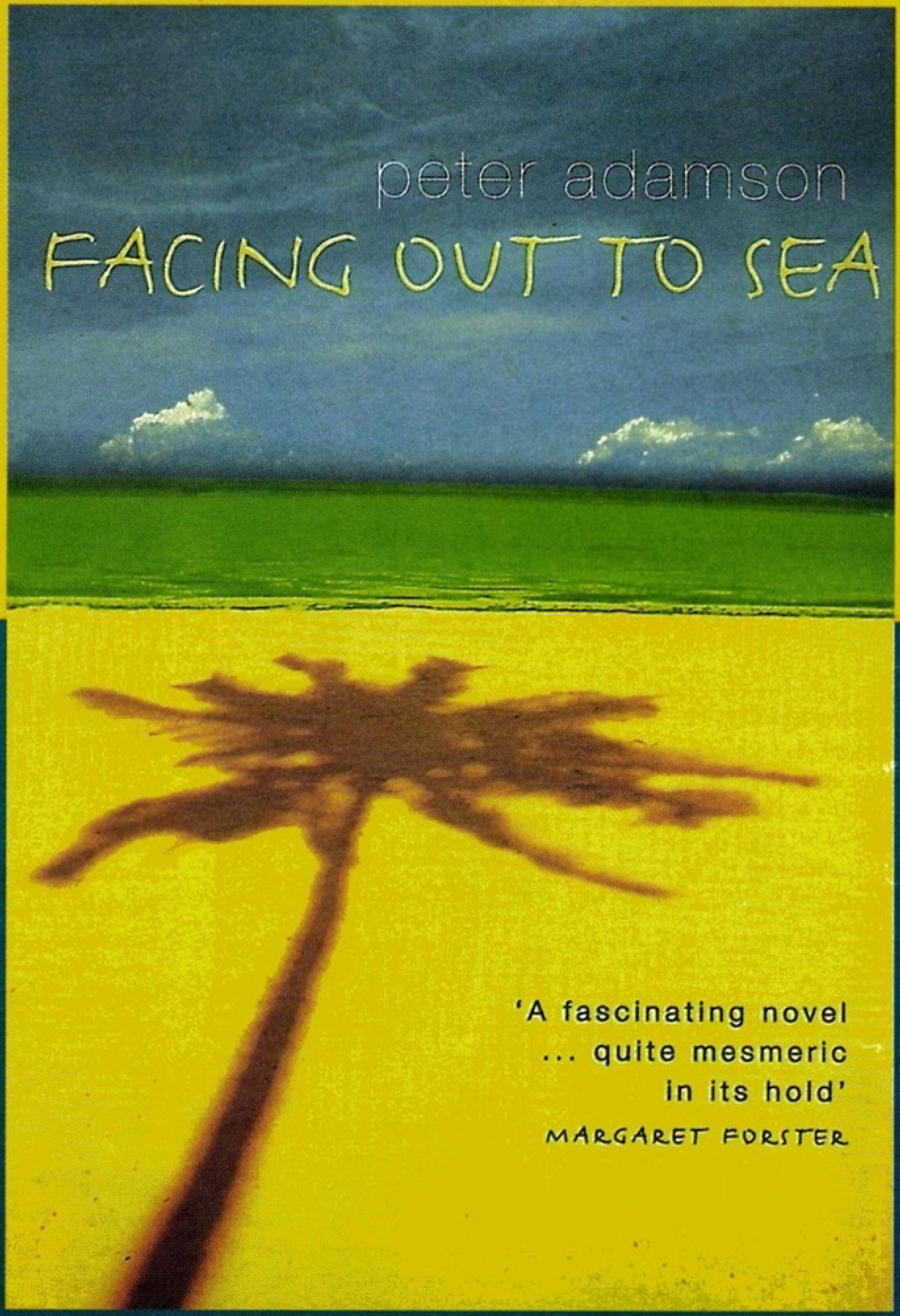

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FRONT COVER CREATED BY GABRIELLE WATTS.
MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **IAN NIXON**.

THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

Jeans

FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

'LIKE music, fashion is a language you can understand without an interpreter' – Strellson Menswear.

'Be good. Be bad. Just be' – Calvin Klein.

Well, thanks for the tip, Calvin. I'd been browsing through the magazines at my local newsagent, reading the fashion pages of the daily paper and watching stuff about style on TV, to get some idea of what's going down with blue jeans. After a week on alcoholic food, sex cheetahs in lingerie, camouflage gear and stars eating cake, *plus* the chance to cover a naked woman with custard on a *free* CD, I'd had enough. It's all such *serious* fun. So, so... *Vroom!* Not really appropriate for a middle-aged editor of what the Brit cartoon rag *Viz* once dubbed the *Smug Internationalist*.

How good it is to grow older in an age of nostalgia. You can blame all your own follies on a 'misspent youth', yet still keep pace. My 1960s Levi's jeans are under the kitchen sink. My original Beatles and Stones on vinyl – *Sticky Fingers* with jeans and a real zip on the sleeve – are objects of desire. And who stole my Blue Note Jimmy Smith? So I know how it happens, how you can get hooked on style by stealth. The power of suggestion is so strong you don't see it coming.

Something similar happens when you edit one of these magazines. At first a topic can look obscure. You're not quite sure if there's any evidence at all of its existence out there, let alone if anyone has something fresh to say about it. Soon you find it everywhere, popping up like Spring blooms from the cold earth. So, over the years, I've lived for a while in a world exuberantly sprouting madness, hard drugs, tropical trees, robber barons, rubber tappers, class and Lord alone knows what else.

But blue jeans were different. I knew they were everywhere before I started, and I wear them myself. So I had to keep an eye out for jeans which were *not* blue-denim. I went for hemp. You may have noticed that I'm wearing hemp jeans in the photograph.

In the pub one evening I was discussing the wonders of this benign plant, its perfection as the source of fabric for jeans and the wilful blindness of the world to its virtues, when a Canadian at the next table gave me his money belt. Unsure quite what he had in mind, I was about to give it back to him when he said:

'Hemp.'

'Hemp?' I asked.

'The belt is made of hemp,' he said.

'Of course!' I said, stroking the fabric.

He lifted his shoe.

'Hemp,' he said again, pointing.

'Good heavens!' I said.

I wanted to know where he got those shoes – rather fetching, I thought – and was ready for a chat. But, having made his point, he seemed to lose interest. With his friends he began making hand prints the colour of blood on pieces of white paper.

Never did show me his trousers, though. Looked a bit synthetic to me.

David Ransom

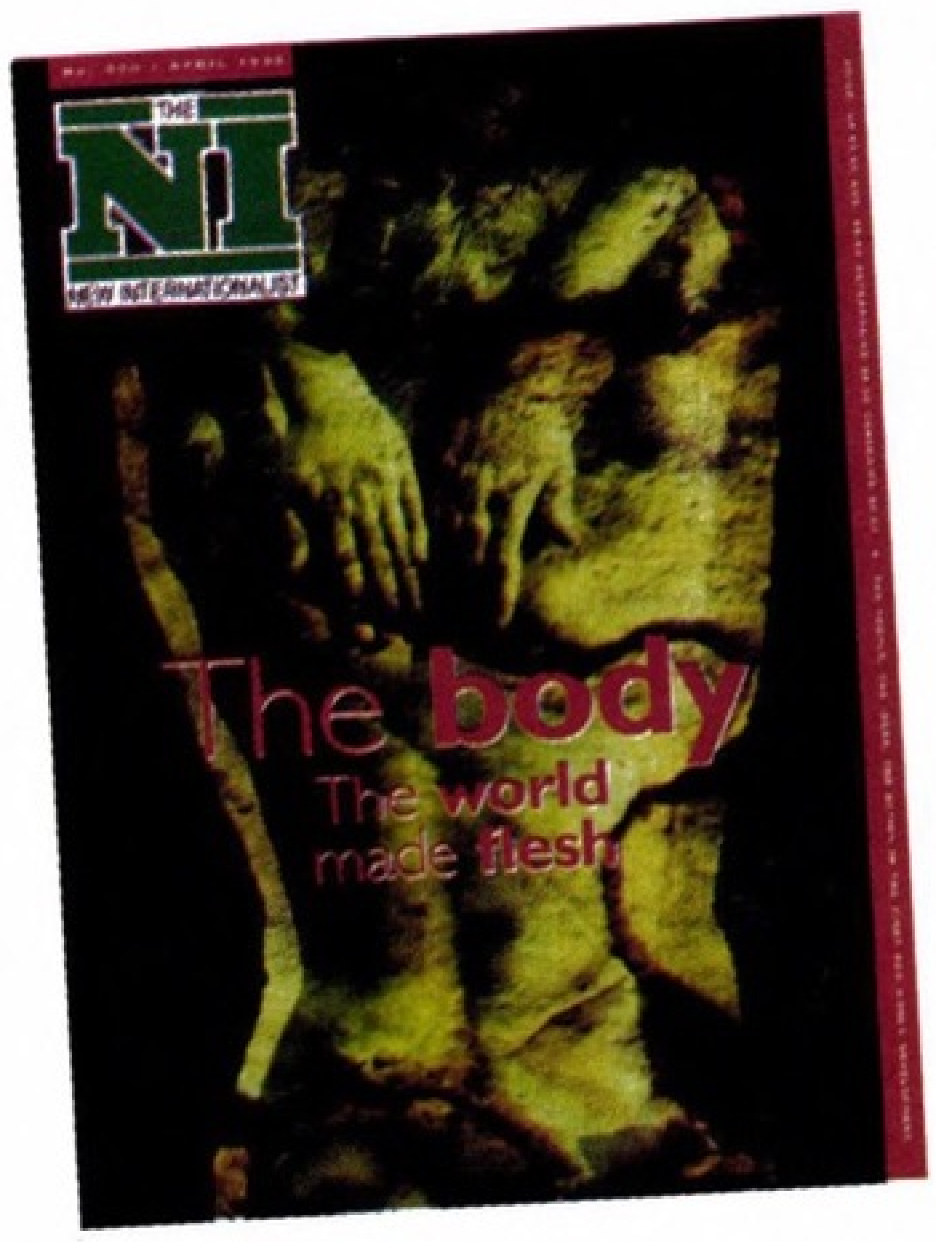
David Ransom
for the ***New Internationalist*** *Co-operative*

Letters

The New Internationalist welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address and e-mail are inside the front cover.

Male bodies

Thank you for a thoughtful issue about the body (**NI 300**), including creative and important comments about the female body and the gender-ambiguous body. As a man I looked for similar thoughtfulness about the male body, but nothing.



Is there nothing of any signficance that could be said about the bodily experience of being a man today? Western society projects the male-strong-aggressive body versus the female-vulnerable-sexy one. These stereotypes damage and oppress both men and women and need to be questioned together. Men are dogged by being the invisible gender, but I hoped for better from the **NI**.

David Muir
Long Eaton, England.

Voices heard

Your recent ***Mining*** issue (**NI 299**) illustrated how many communities around the world are suffering from the dire consequences of opencast mining. This is not just restricted to the Majority World; in Scotland too opencast mining is beginning to cause untold problems.

Thirty years ago, it represented only five per cent of mining in Scotland. By 1994 it had risen to 75 per cent and last year the tonnage approval rate was 87 per cent (compared to 11 per cent in England).

Added to this is the fear that exhausted sites will be used for waste disposal. In Perth and Kinross and in Fife communities are battling with the authorities to stop the dumping of abattoir remains, raw human effluent and industrial waste in disused opencast mines. In East Ayrshire communities are suffering from the sheer number of sites surrounding their villages and fears are growing throughout the Lothians and Lanarkshire as new proposals continue to appear.

The human-rights abuses suffered may not be as extreme as those suffered by people in Sierra Leone. But abuses are taking place and people are desperate to get their voices heard by an apparently unsympathetic Government.

Mandy Meikle
West Calder, Scotland

Responsible company

I am writing in connection with the issue on ***Mining*** (**NI 299**). Many of the thrusts of the articles challenge the need and desirability of mineral and metal production. They do not provide the reader with an unbiased assessment of the pertinent issues which might enable him or her to reach a balanced view.

A number of points occur to me. The first is that the growing world population needs minerals and metals for sustainable development. There is no realistic alternative to using more metals and minerals to support the aspirations for a better quality of life. Secondly, the mining industry is constantly looking to replace resources through new discoveries. Metals are abundant and there is no more indication now than there was then that the world will run out of minerals. The mining industry recognizes the importance of recycling. Most recent statistics show that more than 35 per cent of the world's copper, 27 per cent of aluminium and 50 per cent of lead is supplied by recycling materials. However there is not enough recyclable material to meet growing demand.

Contrary to the picture painted by the articles, Rio Tinto is a responsible company, committed to the highest safety, environmental, community relations and human-rights standards, as well as good employment practices and access to land issues. We recently adopted a new Statement of Business Practice *The way we work.*

We welcome public scrutiny of our business practices ; however, your issue neither enlightened your readership about the principal issues associated with mineral production nor provided constructive comment or suggestion.

Shaun Stewart
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No evidence

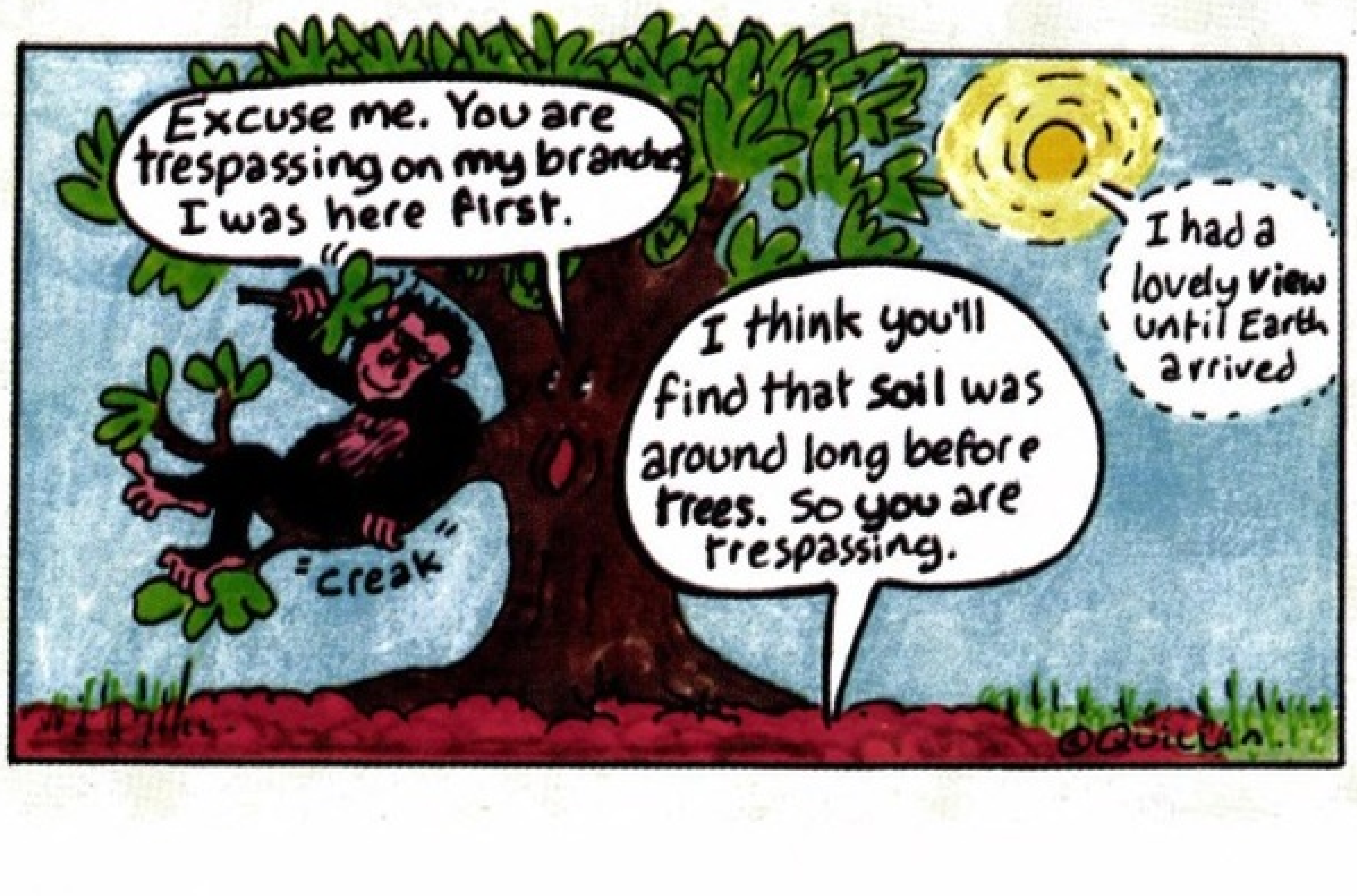
Suzanne Methot, the reviewer of Arthur J Ray's book on Canada's native people (*Reviews* **NI 300**) is wrong to dismiss the theory that the first colonization of the New World by humans was across the Bering Strait land bridge.

Humans evolved in Africa and spread out across the Earth from there. Genetically, all native Americans are of similar stock to the peoples of the Far East.

There is no evidence of the independent evolution of humans in Canada. Aboriginal people may believe they have always been there, but holding such a belief does not make it true.

Nor is it necessary to hold such a belief in order to respect native Americans' prior claim to the land. That arises from their having been the first humans to enter what really was, 15,000 - 30,000 years ago, a *terra nullius*.

Alisdair Sinclair
Canberra, Australia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I had a lovely view until Earth arrived
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VIV QUILLIN

Speaking out

I must disagree with the statement on page 37 of your issue on human rights (**NI 298**) that 'Afghanistan's women have disappeared...There are no voices any more.' This is very demoralizing for the considerable number who most certainly have not been silenced. These women take considerable risks to speak out and decry their loss of education and employment. They also continue activities outside the home.

One only has to go to Herat's bazaar to see several hundred women every day, busily selling second-hand articles, many wearing the Iranian-style *chadors* (veils) which leave their faces bare. Full veiling is not common for the majority of women who live in rural areas. In Herat, it has ebbed and flowed for hundreds of years; recently it was re-introduced by the *mujahadeen*, and the Taliban have tried to enforce – and have slightly increased – the wearing of the full-veiling *burqa.* It is an issue for some urban women, but it is almost never THE issue, coming way down the priority list behind chronic poverty, lack of access to basic resources, lack of education, crippling work burdens etc.

Kate Straub
Christian Aid, Herat, Afghanistan

Disappointing position

Your *Facts* page in the issue on human rights (**NI 298**) states that the New Zealand Government has a 'cool' position on the issue of indigenous peoples. This is disappointing. That New Zealand's position is below that of Australia, Nicaragua and South Africa is astounding. Governments over time have worked very hard to address the wrong committed against Maori during colonization. This has culminated in the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal and other organizations promoting the rights and welfare of the Maori. Many tribes have taken advantage of the Government's willingness to redress these wrongs and have sought and accepted compensation.

With a little more probing you would have found that New Zealand has many policies to promote favourable race relations.

Lara Hearn
Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand

Coffee catalyst

We were not familiar with the **NI** or the plight of most coffee *campesinos* when I first visited Guatemala last April. We were visiting in order to help build homes in partnership with several farmers. We also learned a lot about the coffee 'value chain' (as industry insiders describe it) but it was not until we went back to Canada that we read your issue on ***Coffee*** (**NI 271**). It served as a catalyst in our lives and further motivated us towards starting a new fair trade import company – Café Campesino. Our first container of fair trade coffee has just arrived in New Orleans and should be ready to sell next week. We are excited to report that we have located quite a few roasters who are interested in the social and environmental issues surrounding their green coffees – and they seem willing to demonstrate this through their purchases. Our new webpage www.cafecampesino.com

Bill Harris and Aileen Pistone
Americus, US

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the New Internationalist.

Letter from Mongolia

Tuya's tale

Louisa Waugh discovers a different world at an orphanage in Ulaanbaatar.

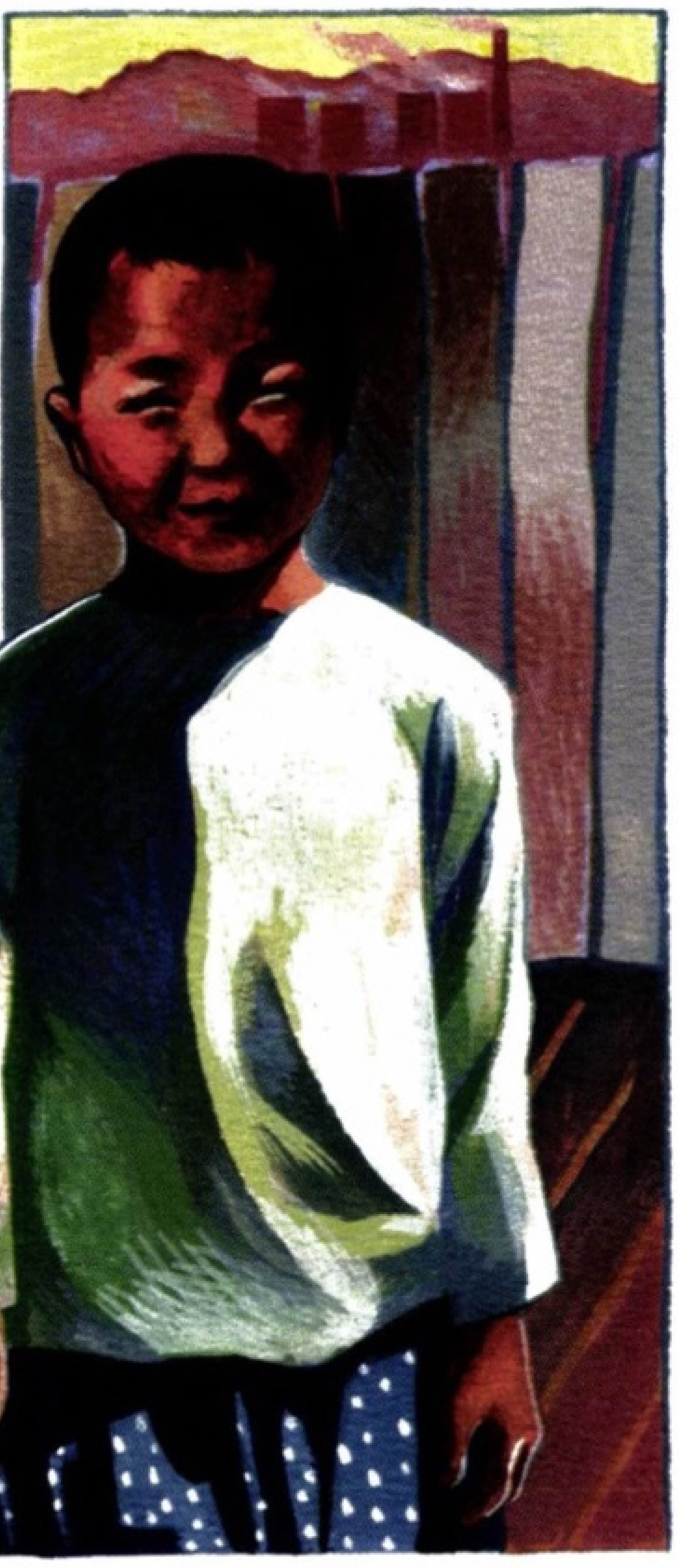
Erdentuya lives in Yarmag ger district. Like just over half of Ulaanbaatar's 600,000 residents she has electricity, but no running water, and an outside toilet in a fenced yard. The view from her house looks out over the meandering Tuul river, which divides Ulaanbaatar, and monstrous power station Number Four, which belches out fumes day and night. Erdentuya lives with 41 other homeless children in a shelter run by an Australian woman and a team of Mongolians. She's ten years old.

I met Tuya, as she's known, in the spring, when I visited the shelter to talk about starting an English class for the older girls. This short, plump child with cropped hair and a habit of staring at the ground to disguise her shyness, could have been a boy or a girl. But her passion for red nail-polish and her gentle manner charmed me and she almost immediately became my blatant favourite.

She was picked up by Ulaanbaatar's children's police two years ago, living on the streets at the age of eight. After being held by a state-run orphanage for several weeks she was handed over to the shelter along with five others.

It took some time before she would tell her story. Her family of ten, who live together in one room just streets away in this unpaved, decaying district, survive on less than seven dollars a month. Tuya's father worried about money, drank cheap, toxic vodka to forget and died young, leaving his wife to fend for the kids any way she could. The family house was rented out to pay for food and clothing and, living literally on top of each other, tempers frayed. Tuya says she ran away because her mother beat her, and has no contact with her immediate family. When Dee Dee, who runs the shelter, asked her gently what she'll do when she gets older, Tuya murmured that she's going to gather and sell fallen coal from the wagons that rumble in and out of Ulaanbaatar's only train station. This after all is how her mother fed the nine children.

Yarmag is the only future Tuya has. Without the shelter she'd be on the streets, forced to beg or scrounge for food and clothing. She could even be reduced to living under the streets, in the sewers, an airless network of hot water and raw waste pipes, which are home to several hundred street children. As it is, years of chronic malnutrition have led to her being physically stunted and developing learning difficulties. She reads and writes a little, but struggles even with basic maths and science. Tuya's unlikely to marry and so will always need some kind of support. She is bullied here and does catch the occasional dose of scabies from one of the new arrivals. But she is safe, well-fed – and cared about.



SARAH JOHN

During one of my recent classes – which she attends but says little – she fell asleep leaning against my shoulder. She snoozed for half an hour before an older girl poked her and ordered her to fetch water. Blinking sleepily, Tuya tottered to her feet and searched for her boots.

This water-carrying is eternal labour. As I walk through Yarmag every Friday afternoon on my way to the shelter I see children, adults and pensioners hauling enormous metal cauldrons, and queues of people waiting patiently to fill their bottles. Cows lumber through the area, grazing on garbage and weeds, and on every corner there's a small kiosk selling a mixture of cigarettes, noodles, washing powder and sweets. This doesn't feel like central Ulaanbaatar, where I live with my running water and nearby supermarket – it doesn't even feel like the same city. It's just seven kilometres, but a world away from Ulaanbaatar's new neon lights, Western-style bars, foreign cars and fast-food cafes.

After my teaching, habitual cup of tea and gossip with the workers, one or two of the children walk me back to the bus stop. Tuya has never come – the older girls who dominate my time and energy, desperate for attention and affection, elect themselves as escorts. But Dee Dee, who knows of my love for this beautiful, shy child, tells me Tuya is standing up for herself a little more these days. 'The attention,' she says, smiling quietly, 'is obviously doing her good.' ■

Louisa Waugh is a freelance writer who lives and works in Mongolia.

Update

Trembling Tigers - aftershocks of the East Asian economic crisis

Fired!

Trade unions respond

While currencies collapsed and financial institutions filed for bankruptcy in East Asia, the world's press bemoaned massive stock-market losses. The people who lost their jobs were mentioned only occasionally.

Despite the Asian Tigers' 'miracle economies', most people live in abject poverty. According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), over 950 million people in South East Asia struggle to survive on less than a dollar a day. Now the majority of East Asians are having to pay for the excesses and corruption of years of economic boom.

'My heart started beating faster when my boss invited me to lunch,' recalls Chae, an assistant director of a Korean advertising agency. 'After lunch he told me reluctantly that I was being dismissed.'

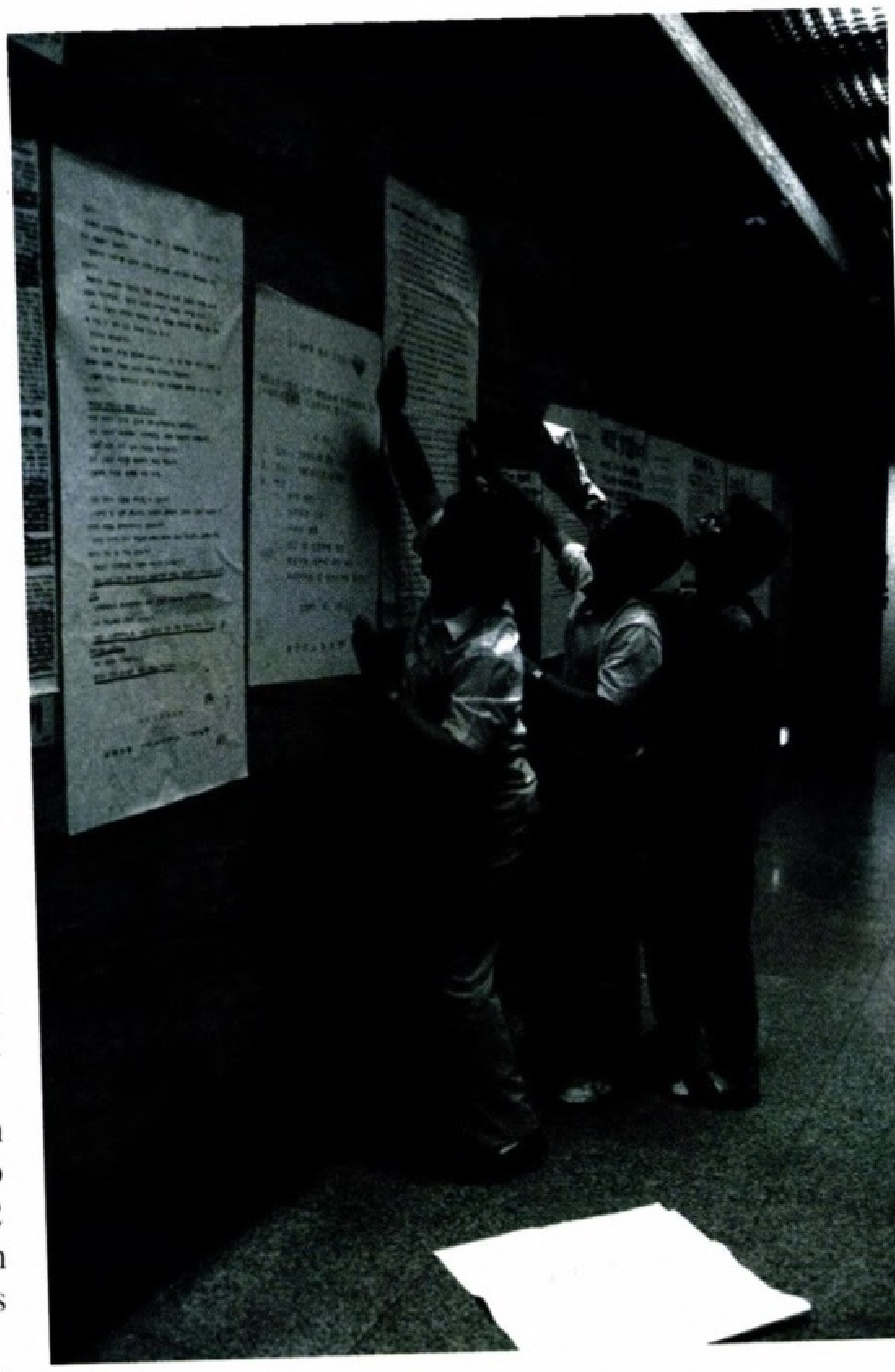
There are millions of men and women like Chae. In Thailand a million job losses are expected during the next 12 months. The situation is similar in Indonesia, where two million job losses are probable.

According to the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) an average of more than 200 companies have shut down each day since the beginning of the crisis, with a record 340 on 5 January 1998. An average 4,000 workers a day have been driven out onto the streets as unemployed.

Asian unions, with the assistance of the ICTFU and International Labor Organization, are now fighting to make indebted governments remember the welfare of working men and women. Despite the advocacy of international trade unions in South Korea, the KCTU has accepted legislation that will allow management to dismiss many workers for 'operational' reasons. In exchange, KCTU's 600,000 members will receive some unemployment insurance, a national teachers' union will be legalized and unions will have the right to participate in politics.

The financial restructuring required by IMF aid packages for East Asian governments involves cuts in public expenditure, tax increases and other 'austerity measures'. The International Federation of Commercial, Clinical, Professional and Technical Employees fears that this sort of 'belt-tightening', when wages are falling and unemployment and basic commodity prices are rising, 'will have significant social consequences'.

'Working people in South East Asia are angry and resentful that they are having to pay the heaviest price for the incompetence and corruption of a few very wealthy individuals and their international backers,' says the ICFTU, which expects 'social tensions to mount as dismissals and pay cuts multiply over the coming months'. In an attempt to harness productively the anger and frustration of East Asia's unemployed millions, the ICFTU Asian and Pacific regional organization (APRO) held a 'Forum on the Asian Economic Turmoil' in Singapore. Delegates from international trade unions, the ILO and even the World Bank and IMF attended. The statement adopted at the Forum calls for the payment of due wages and severance pay; the protection of viable jobs; company-level negotiations on social plans to accompany financial restructuring; the implementation of social and public works programs; a special focus on the impact of the crisis on women workers; and the review of laws and practices that hamper the organization of workers.



HELDUR JAAN NETOCNY / PANOS

Pressing for change – South Korea lost 4,000 jobs per day.

The KCTU and ICFTU agree that confidence will not be restored until 'fundamental reforms are made to ensure democratic accountability and transparency of both the international financial system and national institutions for the regulation of financial markets... Only then will the priorities of fighting unemployment and poverty have their rightful place before the protection of the interests of multinational companies and the fortunes of the narrow élite who have reaped the benefit of trade and financial liberalization.'

Sara Chamberlain

Action against sanctions

Human-rights journalist and campaigner, Felicity Arbuthnot, has fallen foul of British authorities by taking a box of medicine into Iraq without an export licence. The Department of Trade and Industry says she has broken international sanctions on Iraq and they will consider reporting her to customs officials.

Arbuthnot says a professor, whose brother is dying of cancer in Iraq, asked her if she could bring him medicine – a year's supply of chemo therapy. The cancer patient is a doctor who spent many years in London working at the Hammersmith hospital. He had tried to get out of Iraq but the British government refused him a visa.

To stop sanctions against Iraq contact:

***International Action Centre* Tel: +1 212 633 6646; Fax: +2 212 633 2889 email: npc@pipeline.com**

***Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq*, c/o Sebastian Wills, Clare College, Cambridge CB2 1TI, Britain. email: saw27@cam.ac.uk**

***Iraqi Action Coalition* Tel: +1 919 846 8264 Fax: +1 919 846 7422 email: rmasri@nscu.edu**

Stormy seas

Miners have staked the first claim to seabed metal deposits in the South Pacific. Australian Nautilus Minerals won title to nearly 3,200 square kilometres of the territorial waters of Papua New Guinea. The company plans to start taking preliminary hauls of 10,000 tons in the next two years.

Drillbits & Tailings Vol 3 No 2

Aping the UN

Animal-rights activists have launched a campaign for the implementation of a 'United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Great Apes'. Known as the Great Apes Project (GAP), the campaign is an attempt to persuade people that if an animal can feel pain then it deserves the right to be protected by law – just as society protects the interests of children and disabled adults. 'Great apes have emotions, feel pain, experience suffering, and more than 96 per cent of their genes are exactly the same as humans,' says David Pearson from GAP. Pearson reports that some European and North American bio-medical companies experiment on great apes because they are so similar to humans. GAP hope the European Parliament will outlaw this practice.

Asiya Odugleh/Gemini News Service.

CHRIS SATTLEBERGER / PANOS

Tiger papers

Press mauled by soaring newsprint costs

TEMPO
IBNU SUTOWO YANG DITUDING
SUARA PE
HARIAN

Higher prices threaten Indonesia's 100,000 newspaper sellers.

CHRIS STOWERS / PANOS

The price of newsprint in Indonesia has quadrupled, threatening the viability of many newspapers. PT Aspex Paper, which supplies 70 per cent of Indonesian newsprint, says the price change is necessary because of the drop in the value of the *rupiah*. This may be the final blow to newspapers already bleeding from shortfalls in advertising revenue.

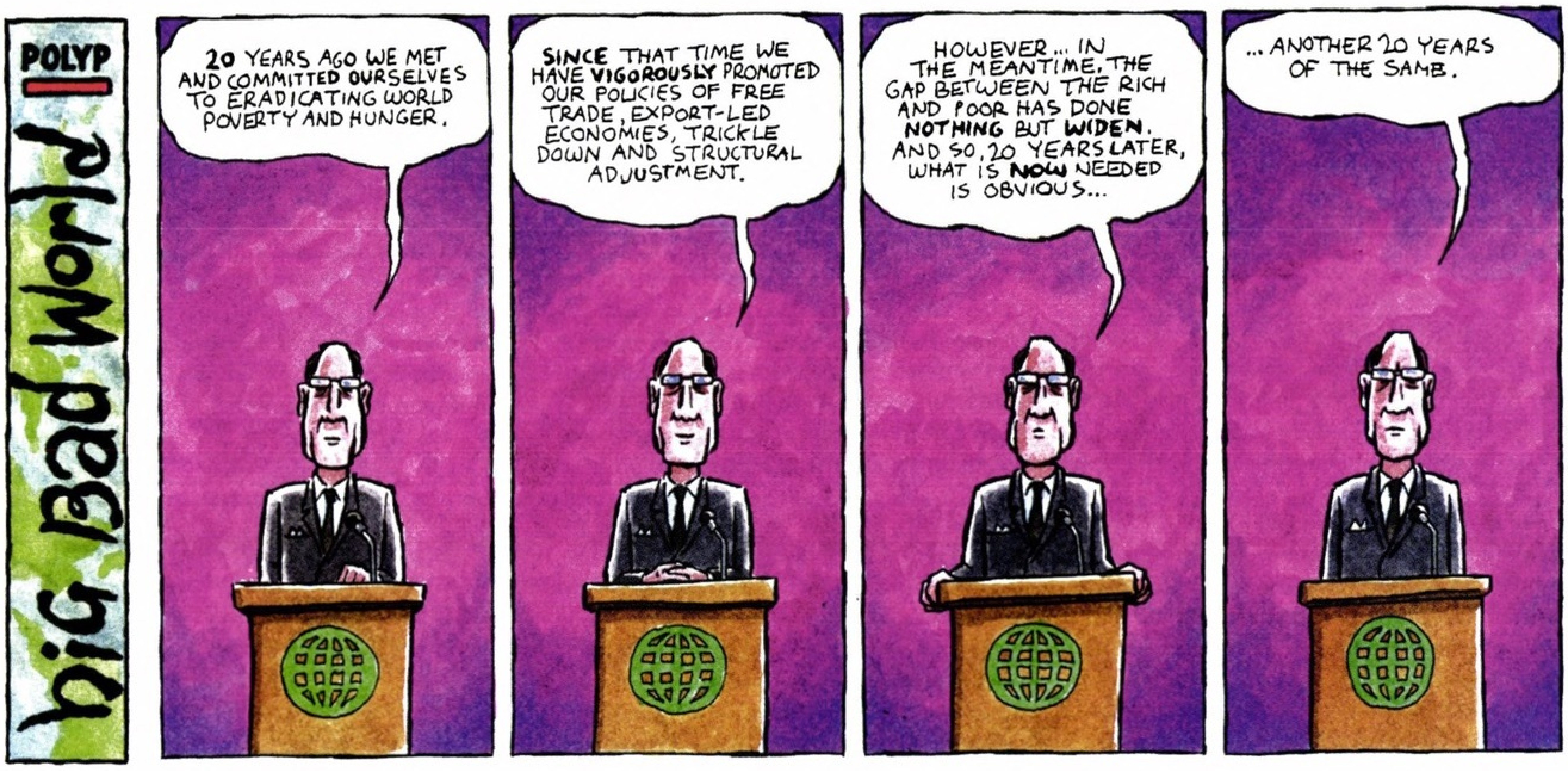
'There's no need for banning. At these prices, the press will die on its own,' grumbles Atal S Depari, Managing Editor of the Jakarta daily *Sinar Pagi*. S Leo Batubara, Secretary of the National Newspaper Association, says only a third of Indonesia's 286 newspapers are actually making money.

Media analysts warn of major staff layoffs in the near future. Many of Indonesia's 5,600 journalists, 11,000 other media workers and 100,000 street sellers could lose their livelihoods.

The public has never been hungrier for news, at a time when President Suharto is under fire for his handling of the economy, and formerly forbidden subjects such as the Presidential succession, are openly discussed. Suharto has no sympathy for the press, which he says worsened the crisis of confidence in the *rupiah* by publishing critical reports.

Despite its alleged clout, the press has been unable to persuade Aspex Paper to reduce prices. 'How can you be so powerful, and at the same time so powerless?' muses Bambang Harymurti, Executive Editor of the daily *Media Indonesia*, where 38 out of 120 editorial employees were recently laid off, along with 69 other workers. Journalists say the Government is not doing anything to bring the price down because it wants less coverage of the crisis.

Margot Cohen/*Far Eastern Economic Review* Vol 161 No 11


POLYP
big Bad World
20 YEARS AGO WE MET AND COMMITTED OURSELVES TO ERADICATING WORLD POVERTY AND HUNGER.
SINCE THAT TIME WE HAVE VIGOROUSLY PROMOTED OUR POLICIES OF FREE TRADE, EXPORT-LED ECONOMIES, TRICKLE DOWN AND STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT.
HOWEVER... IN THE MEANTIME, THE GAP BETWEEN THE RICH AND POOR HAS DONE NOTHING BUT WIDEN. AND SO, 20 YEARS LATER, WHAT IS NOW NEEDED IS OBVIOUS...
...ANOTHER 20 YEARS OF THE SAME.

Trembling Tigers - aftershocks of the East Asian economic crisis

Migrants must go

Foreign workers are thrown out of Malaysia

At least three million migrant workers, who have helped to build the Malaysian economic 'miracle', now face the threat of deportation. Work permits expiring in mid-1998 are unlikely to be renewed. Hundreds of thousands will then be forced to return home to poor families who depend on their remittances.

A year ago, when the economy was booming, the Government encouraged employers to legalize migrant labour, and 12-month work permits were issued. Manufacturing firms even sent personnel managers to Indonesia and Bangladesh to look for additional staff.

Now migrants are often sacked without pay and some employers even refuse to give back their passports. 'There's no law that states migrant workers have to be compensated if they're laid off,' says Angela Khoo, human-resources manager for an electronics company in Penang.

CHRIS STOWERS / PANOS

Packing their bags – labourers make hasty preparations to leave.

Malaysia's building industry used to employ 300,000 migrants – mostly Indonesians – earning between 1,000 and 1,500 *ringgit* ($238-357) per month. Faced with a glut of commercial property and a credit squeeze, developers are having to cancel projects, shed jobs and cut wages. Kus, an Indonesian labourer, says: 'We are farmers back home, and we came here to earn money to send to our families. We are forced to do heavy work for low wages, but we have no choice.'

Liana, an Indonesian maid in Kuala Lumpur, says: 'I don't want to go back now, due to the worsening situation there.' Deputy Home Affairs Minister Tajol Rosli says most of the 140,000 registered overseas maids will be sent back once their permits expire, as they are not helping the country's foreign-exchange earnings.

Apart from the 1.2 million migrants who have permits, up to 1.8 million others are working illegally. Officials are stepping up attempts to deport them – more than 17,000 Indonesians without documents have been held in crowded detention centres since the beginning of the year. Reports have come in of detainees being poisoned, tortured, starved and killed.

The migrants who must get out of Malaysia fear that there will not be time to organize a safe departure. Fernandez says: 'We propose that the Government gives a reprieve of at least three months to allow them to work, earn enough to purchase their ticket and return home.'

Anil Netto/Gemini News Service

请您注意安全
Please pay action to safe
PIETERNELLA PIETERSE / PANOS

Wall not so Great

The Great Wall of China has been vandalized near the town of Shanhaikuan. Bulldozers have knocked a hole in the wall to build a road, and another section was toppled to expand a vegetable market. Only a small part of the wall north of Beijing has been preserved as a tourist attraction. Many locals do not see the wall as a symbol of national pride but as a reminder of the tyranny of emperors. Others are pragmatic about its use. One local says: 'I'll tell you when I care about the Great Wall – when I am very, very rich.'

World Press Review Vol 5 No 3

Nuclear stock

World stockpiles of plutonium will triple over the next 12 years, according to a leaked report by a US company. NAC International, which transports nuclear fuel, predicts that by 2010 the amount of fissile plutonium separated by the world's nine commercial reprocessing plants will have risen from 140 to 400 tonnes. An atomic bomb can be made from less than five kilograms of fissile plutonium.

New Scientist No 2117

Comic Euro

Governments are using cartoons to try and sell the idea of a single European currency, the Euro. In Italy children can read about the adventures of a duck who tries to replace the 937 types of money on planet Bazar with one currency. A British comic strip on the Internet features Captain Euro and his buxom, blonde sidekick Europa who 'defends the security of Europe and upholds the values of the union'. A new German children's book, *Die Euro Kids*, goes on a European journey to discover whether 'people really want the new money' while being followed by a suspicious character in dark sunglasses and a yellow coat who is later revealed to be the European Union Finance Minister. The cartoons are part of a response to polls suggesting only 47 per cent of Europeans support monetary union.

Time Vol 151 No 11

Quote

'We are feeding the chicken in US dollars, but what we get is *ringgit* (the local currency).'

Chia Keok Keong, secretary of Malaysia's Federation of Livestock Farmers Association on why his group sought government approval for a hike in the price of eggs.

Jeans the big stitch-up

ROBERT HARDING

Fooled by false labels, **David Ransom** sets off in pursuit of the politically correct pair.

My love affair with blue jeans began when I got into a bath with my very first pair. In the days before pre-shrunk denim, this was what I thought you had to do with jeans labelled 'shrink-to-fit' – a fine example of marketing spin.

As I lay in the steam and mused about this, that, and the consequences of excess shrinkage, I noticed that something was amiss. Indigo was billowing through the bath water like a royal haemorrhage. Leaping out, I peeled off the garment to find the skin of my nether regions stained the colour of woad – the indigo dye was not 'fixed' and the bath should have been cold.

Thus far – the mid-1960s – my youth had been clothed in the abrasive texture and baggy deformity of grey flannel. Compared with this hateful fabric, blue denim was truly miraculous. Hard-wearing, relatively cheap, comfortable, warm in winter, cool in summer and oddly neutral in colour – almost anything seemed to match – it kept its shape and hid the dirt until you threw it into the wash with old golf balls to induce 'fade'. Functional yet stylish, the more you wore it, the more stylish it became.

Jeans had a special aura. Hard to find in the shops, they could be repaired, embroidered, 'personalized'. You could stitch things on to them or rip them up. They were adaptable, from drainpipes to flares. You could make a statement without saying a word. They made you distinctive yet free from the fear of looking odd. In fact, in blue jeans you could be whatever you wanted: masculine, feminine, granny, groupie, peasant, potentate. Whoever you were, you could be someone else. Jeans made marketing dreams come true.

The original associations came, of course, from America via the Wild West and the Hollywood dream factory – youthful, individualistic, forward-looking. They were hard to resist if you were growing up as I was, in a weary, unctuous Britain still gazing backwards into the imperial sunset.

Jeans fast went on to become an icon that clothed the universal promise of postwar consumer capitalism, insinuating themselves into the aspirations of anyone who could be persuaded to buy into it. Today you can find them down gold mines in South Africa, up mountains in the Peruvian Andes, from the forests of the Congo to the catwalks of New York and Milan. When the flamboyant young designer of Paris *haute couture*, John Galliano, was asked on TV a few months ago what he thought was the single most important garment of all time, you just knew he had to say 'jeans'.

I'm not sure when all this began to wear thin. Perhaps it was when sick 'poverty chic' and 'grunge' hit the fashion catwalks in the 1990s, followed by 'heroin chic' in New York, all clad in blue denim. Or maybe 'youth' figured out that if you aspire to be someone else for too long you become nobody at all and end up in uniform. And then, since all jeans are basically the same, paying double for the latest breed of 'designer' labels is hardly smart.

In any event, after a boom in the 1980s sparked by the global selling-fest of the Los Angeles Olympics, sales of blue jeans and the labelled sports shoes associated with them began to slow and then fall away.

One day last winter a young woman from Guatemala came to see me. She described to me her daily life in a Korean-owned *maquila* – export factory – stitching jackets for the American market. Driven on by shrieking supervisors, she said, she made so many jackets in a day, and for so little money, that I could scarcely believe her. She assured me this was better than having no job at all, but I was unable to imagine what could be worse. As she talked, so softly, she trembled. News had already reached home that she had been speaking out. There had been threats against her children. I must not print her name or take her photograph. All that remains with me now is her words.[1]

So I remembered what I should never have allowed myself to forget. The nature of a thing is not to be found in its 'image'. It lies in the materials and in the people who made it. The icons of consumer capitalism are made in secret: the raw materials plundered from behind the perimeter fences of private property; the 'goods' stitched together in 'postmodern' labour camps, anonymous sheds filled with human misery, scattered around the world along the meandering borderline between consumers and producers, profit and loss. The 'image' of consumer capitalism lies.

Jeans are made from cotton, and cotton has spread like the fronds of Deadly Nightshade across five per cent of the earth's cultivable surface, invading fertile

Looking closely into the promise of jeans in Kinshasa, Congo, the youth market sizes up the prospects of ascending into a strangely relocated heaven.

ICP
Tél. 80809
B.P. 13108
MAC KEEN
MARQUE DEPOSEE

ALEX WEBB / MAGNUM

B KLASS / PANOS

Lined up and taken to the cleaners – 'stonewashing' in the export-processing zone of Chittagong, Bangladesh, making jeans old before their time.

land in hungry communities, sucking them dry with irrigation, shrouding them in poison. Cotton uses higher volumes of more toxic pesticides than any other crop – a quarter of the world's pesticides are sprayed on it, causing a million cases of human poisoning every year.[2] To make the fabric, cotton is treated with another concoction of chemicals. Most of the vast quantities of toxins released by the textiles industry into the air, soil and water derive from the dyeing process. Parts of New Mexico have been destroyed by the extraction of pumice for 'stone-washing' jeans.

Fabric is too floppy, the human body too irregular and the stitching too intricate to allow for much automation beyond the sewing machine and the individual operator – almost always a young woman – making one garment at a time. So jeans are stitched together in hundreds upon thousands of 'sweatshops' that have sniffed out the lowest wages in the world in places like Guatemala, Bangladesh or the Philippines, or in the immigrant 'rag trade' areas of Los Angeles, New York, Toronto, Sydney or London.

As a stock item, jeans have fallen prey to the concentration of capital in the retail sector – that is, to an ever-smaller number of ever-larger retail 'chains' that sell most of the garments we wear. They dictate what gets made, and collect half the retail price of the garment for their pains. It is their business to promote the slightest modification in design as a significant shift in 'fashion' – and a good reason to buy yet another pair of jeans.

So now, in the 'postmodern' age our largest and most useful industry supplying a necessity little less basic than food has headed off in a cloud of poison back to the dark, satanic mills of the nineteenth century. This we call 'development' – for it is axiomatic to orthodox economic theory that textiles and garments are the 'first rung on the ladder' that leads to industrial wealth and general prosperity.

The benefit of all this is said to be that consumer capitalism provides us with endless convenience and choice. From the $10 working pair of blue jeans to the up-scale designer 'label' selling for $100 and more, there's a pair for everyone.

But suppose what you want is something quite elementary – a garment that isn't drenched in poison and sweat. With a simple commodity, like coffee, there are fairly-traded brands. But applying similar principles of eco-friendliness and social justice to the complexities of cotton cultivation, spinning, dyeing, weaving, cutting, stitching, the rag trade and the fashion business in general is quite another matter – and that much more central to the state we are in.

The brand I began with, way back in the mid-1960s, was Levi's. Levi Strauss & Co – by now the world's largest garment company – has a benevolent reputation. It withdrew production contracts from Burma and China because of human-rights violations. When it discovered child labour at one of its contractors in Bangladesh it did not throw the children onto the streets, but offered education instead. It has retained garment factories with recognized trade unions in the US. It has devised and implemented what is widely regarded as the best corporate code of business ethics there is.

Relative to union-busting, sex-toting 'labels' like Guess? Inc – which is more representative of most labels – Levi's looks positively saintly, not to say smug. Perhaps it can afford to be so, by charging a healthy premium for the 'cult' status of its jeans.

Still, Levi's is a long way from perfect. It has shown little serious interest in organic cotton and alternative fibres. Levi's will not allow independent monitoring, which makes its code of ethics worth a great deal less. Last November the company announced massive job losses across the US – and, in April this year, a return to China.

Clarence Grebey of Levi Strauss pleaded: 'It is a business decision based on our belief that we can now identify business partners in mainland China who will comply with our strict codes of conduct. If that's not the case, we will not do business there.'

Harry Wu, the US human-rights activist, responded: 'What's improved in China is the business climate. In fact, human-rights violations are getting worse. Forced labour is still used in the garment industry. There are no independent unions and anyone who tries to organize workers would end up in a re-education camp.'[3] On balance, I feel more inclined to take the advice of Harry Wu than Clarence Grebey.

So, between the big companies that dominate the jeans market, the choice is entirely relative. Among the worst is Guess? Inc. Because US garment workers, and their union UNITE, are promoting a boycott of Guess products, no-one in their right mind should touch them. Among the best is Levi's. But globalized 'cheap' labour and industrial cotton are integral to all of them. Corporate codes of conduct have strict limitations. Business is business.

So I turned to the ecological front – studiously ignored by the big companies – where, to begin with, things looked a little more promising. The Internet threw up several suppliers of organic-cotton jeans, but they're sold only in North America. In Europe, *Panda*, the catalogue of WWF in Zurich, offers 'Bio-Damensjeans "Girls Fit"'. Not meant for me.

Suppose what you want is something quite elementary – a garment that isn't drenched in poison and sweat

I had also heard rumours that the original jeans were made from hemp, a fibre more usually associated with rope and

HEMP
VALLEY
Why Hemp?
Hemp has been used for clothing for more than 10,000 years. Egyptian Faraos used to wear hemp.It is the strongest natural material to make clothes and it can be grown without polluting pesticides by wearing Hemp you can support mother earth to survive.
Hemp Valley garments are made from almost THC free Hemp fibers. If you try to smoke the garment you will get nothing but an awful headache.
Save the Planet

Lovely but not quite perfect – the hemp jeans that come from China.

sacks. There is a dedicated band of devotees who claim that hemp doesn't need pesticides and has 25,000 different uses: the war on drugs (yes, hemp is the source of marijuana) might be a scam by vested cotton interests to scupper a dangerous rival. Then the Body Shop launched a new line in hemp cosmetics – immediately condemned and therefore promoted by the drugs warriors.

On the Internet again I found hemp jeans from Romania priced at $60 – but, once more, available only in the US. In a catalogue there was a pair priced at $150 – too extravagant for me. I set an upper limit for myself of $100 – steep enough, but at least in the same bracket as 'designer' labels. Then, through *Ethical Consumer* magazine, I found the Hemp Union of Hull, and Dick Bye on the other end of a telephone.

Yes, he said, Hemp Union sells blue jeans at $100. In fact, he sent me a pair in 'natural' colours. I am wearing them now. They are lovely – softer and floppier than denim, like linen but tougher, warmer. There are very fetching, distinctive green leaves on the label, which says: 'If you try to smoke the garment you will get nothing but an awful headache. Save the Planet.'

But what about the claim that Hemp Union products 'are manufactured without exploitation'? Well, he said, the jeans were made for a company in Denmark by a manufacturer in – China. The PC pair is, said Dick Bye, perfectly feasible, but would cost more than three times as much, 'and we don't feel that the current market would stand this'. I'm sure he's right.

I thought about this for a minute. If poison-and-sweat-free jeans cost $300, who pays the difference between that and the $50 pair? Why, the human environment and those young women in sweatshops, of course. In effect, they provide a subsidy to consumers. Think about this a little more, and you realize that if producers were paid more, so that they could afford to buy fairly-traded products that in turn cost less, and you'd be arriving at the right destination – while travelling in the opposite direction to current orthodoxy.

The fact is, however, that the perfectly PC pair of jeans does not exist. We don't have that limitless choice after all. It is not just the image, but the promise, of consumer capitalism that lies.

As 'consumers' we do indeed have some power. We should use it as constructively as we can, opting for the relatively good rather than the absolutely bad products. This means thinking differently, reclaiming the substance of 'identity' from the silly labels that litter the marketplace, deriving some sense of discovery – rather than 'inconvenience' – from the process. Of course, in the rich world at least, 'consumer' movements have been active for some time. So far as jeans are concerned they have yet to start a revolution, though perhaps we should not be surprised. After all, no-one ever changed anything of importance just by buying something else.

Meanwhile, the people who make jeans are busy figuring out how best to put things right. Eventually they must succeed, if only because humanity will not tolerate such shameful treatment for ever. So too – and thanks to a small but growing band of pioneers – organic cotton and alternative fibres offer a viable alternative to industrial cotton. In the end they too must succeed, because neither will the earth tolerate such mistreatment indefinitely.

But if we wait until the globalizers of consumer capitalism have run out of runway, a wreck is all we'll find at the end of it. A *political* response, and political support for the alternatives, is now required. That means weaving the two strands of ecology and social justice together. For the most part they still run in parallel, preoccupied with their own priorities. Each tends to look upon the other as an extra burden, a different history. But when they are woven into 'fair' – opposed to 'free' – trade, then each will be made stronger by the other, and real change will at last become possible.

In the meantime, what we do have is a sense of direction. Truth to tell, it's a much more attractive, far less suicidal route than the one we're travelling at present. It's been mapped out for us over the years by people who refuse to accept that nothing can be done and no-one is listening. All we have to do is prove that they're right. ■

MICHAEL J O'BRIEN / PANOS

Get off your arse and do something!

ACTION AND FURTHER READING

If you're interested in textiles and the environment, an excellent first port of call is the **Textiles Environmental Network (TEN)**, c/o National Centre for Business & Ecology, The Peel Building, University of Salford, Manchester M5 4WT, UK, Tel: +44 161 295 5276, Fax: +44 161 295 5041, e-mail: NCBE@NCBE.salford.ac.uk Website: http://www.NCBE.co.uk

The very friendly **Hemp Union** is at 24 Anlaby Road, Hull, HU1 2PA, UK, Tel/Fax: +44 1482 225328, e-mail: director@hemp-union.karoo.co.uk

You'll find plenty of contacts on other issues listed with the relevant features in this magazine.

There's only a very limited amount of good reading on this topic, but fortunately we do have ***No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade and the Rights of Garment Workers***, edited by Andrew Ross, Verso, New York and London, 1997 – an anthology of sparky features and pictures that's a classic of its kind. Also worth a look is the booklet ***Of Rags and Riches***, published in January 1997 by the Clean Clothes Campaign, PO Box 11584, 1001 GN Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Tel: +31 20 428 18 24, Fax: +31 20 420 99 25, e-mail: ccc@xs4all.nl

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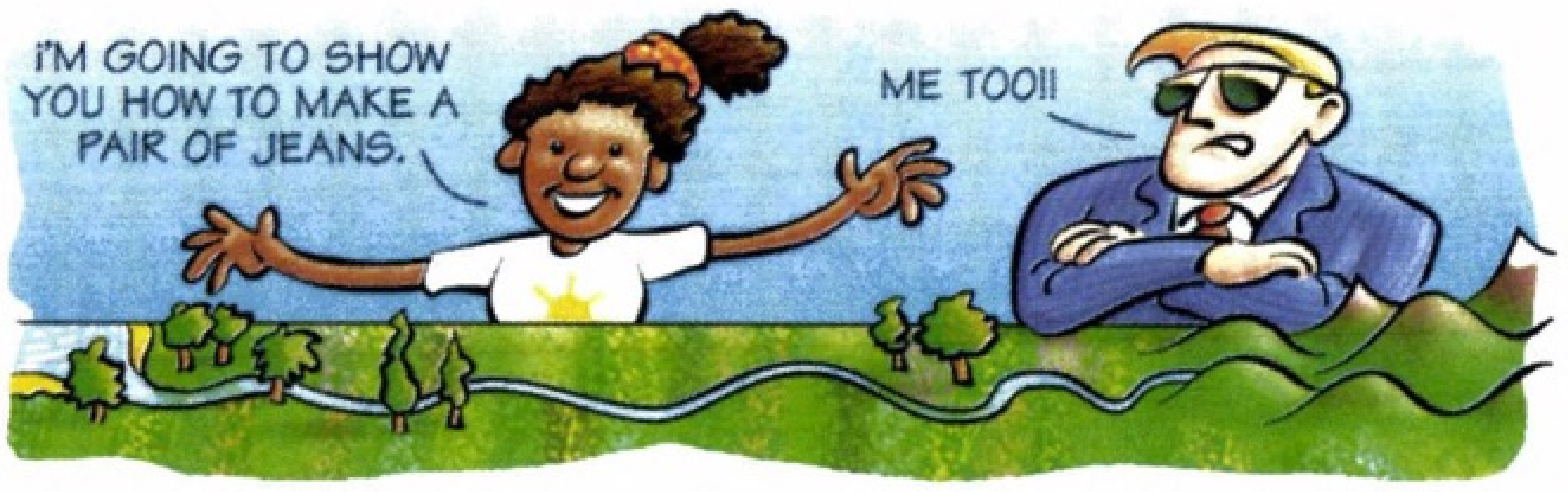
1 For further information contact Central America Women's Network, e-mail: cawn@gn.apc.org **2** *Ethical Consumer*, no 50, Dec 1997/Jan 1998. **3** Greg Frost, 'Human rights groups assail Levi Strauss over China', Reuters, 9 April 1998.

GREEN JEANS

The lifecycle of an icon – or how to turn your blue jeans green

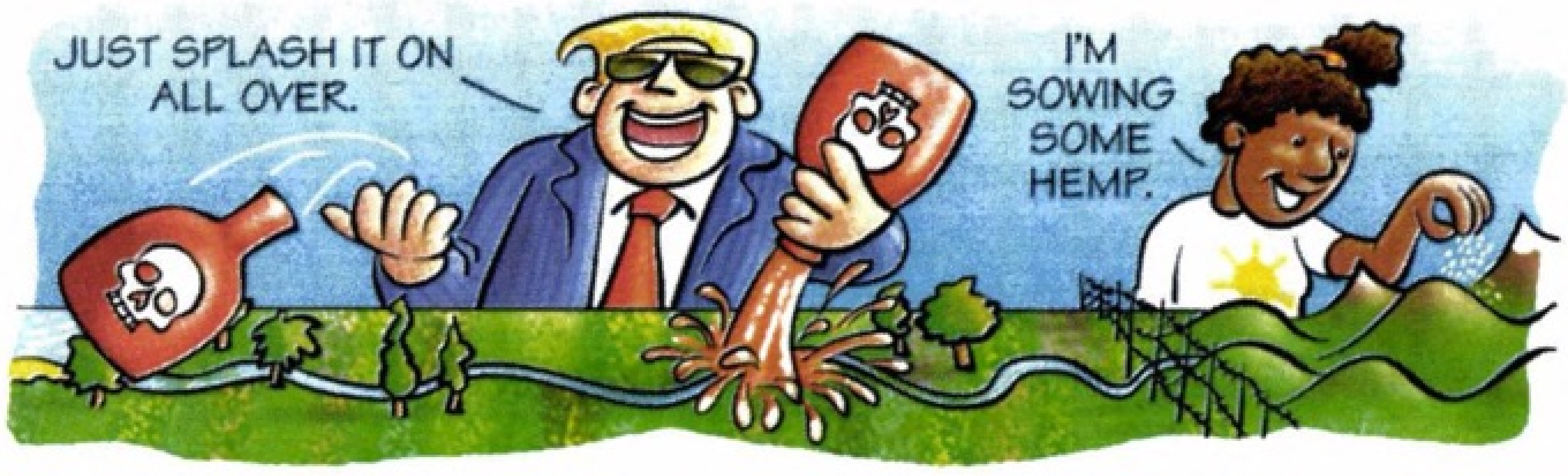

I'M GOING TO SHOW YOU HOW TO MAKE A PAIR OF JEANS.
ME TOO!!

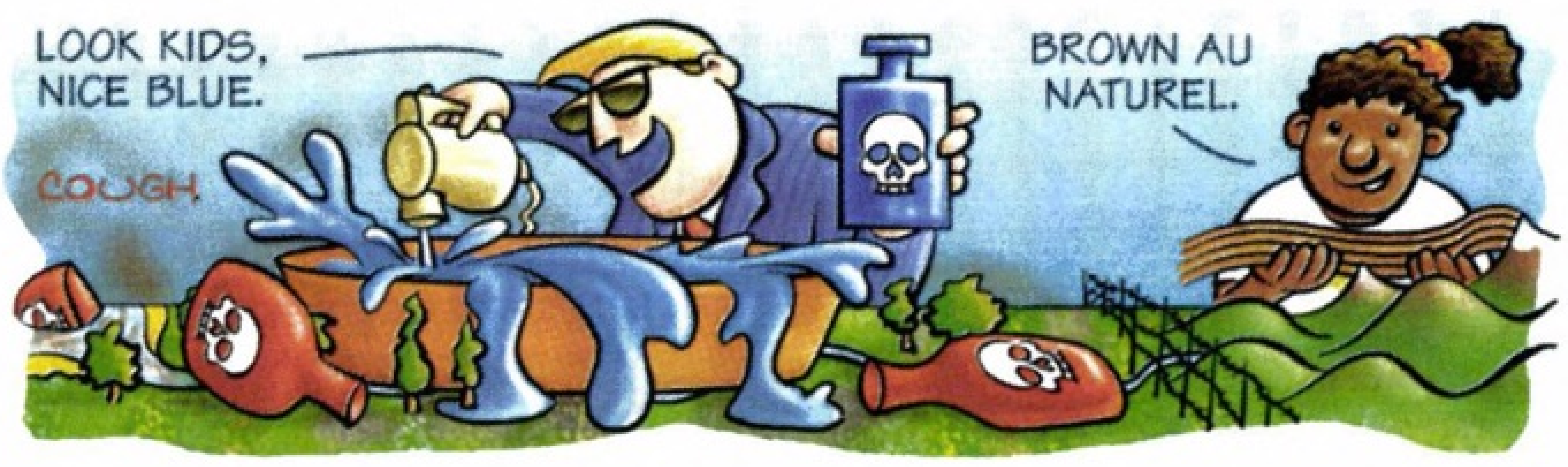
GIMME SOME ROOM HERE.

Growing

Cotton – from which denim is made – uses enormous quantities of pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, irrigated water supplies and a large chunk of fertile land in some of the world's hungriest countries.

Organic cotton cuts out the chemicals; hemp grows almost anywhere without the need for pesticides.


JUST SPLASH IT ON ALL OVER.
I'M SOWING SOME HEMP.


LOOK KIDS, NICE BLUE.
COUGH
BROWN AU NATUREL.

Dyeing

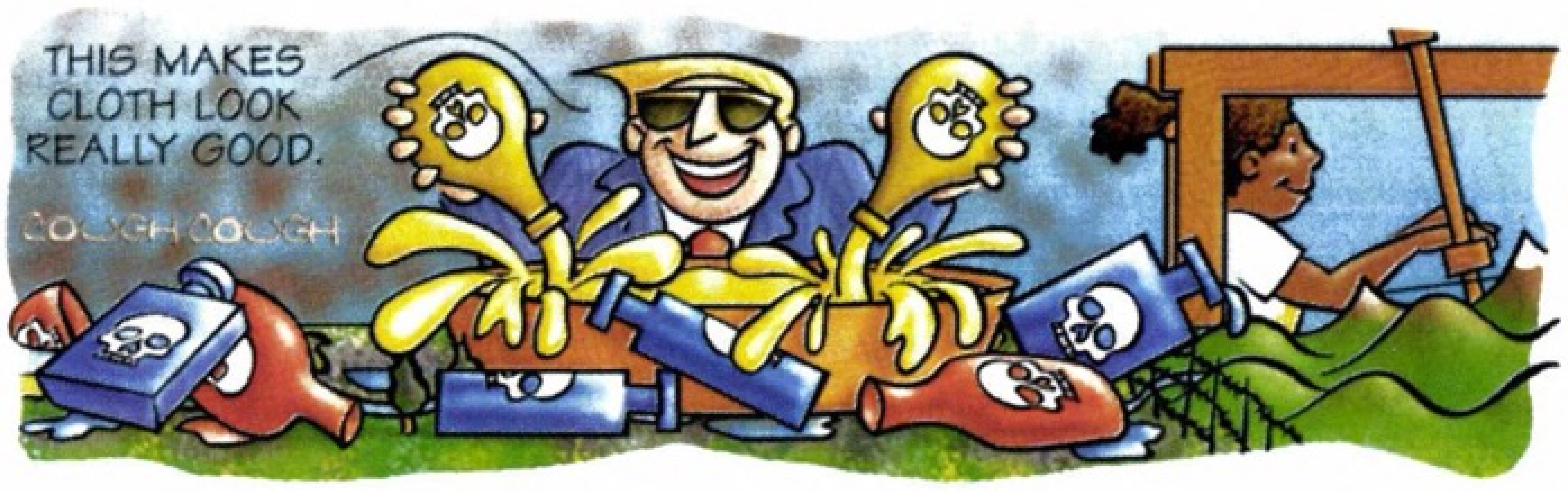
Every year, thousands of tons of deadly toxins go into producing synthetic indigo, the shade of blue in jeans. The darker a dye the more toxic it is, so indigo is a major pollutant.

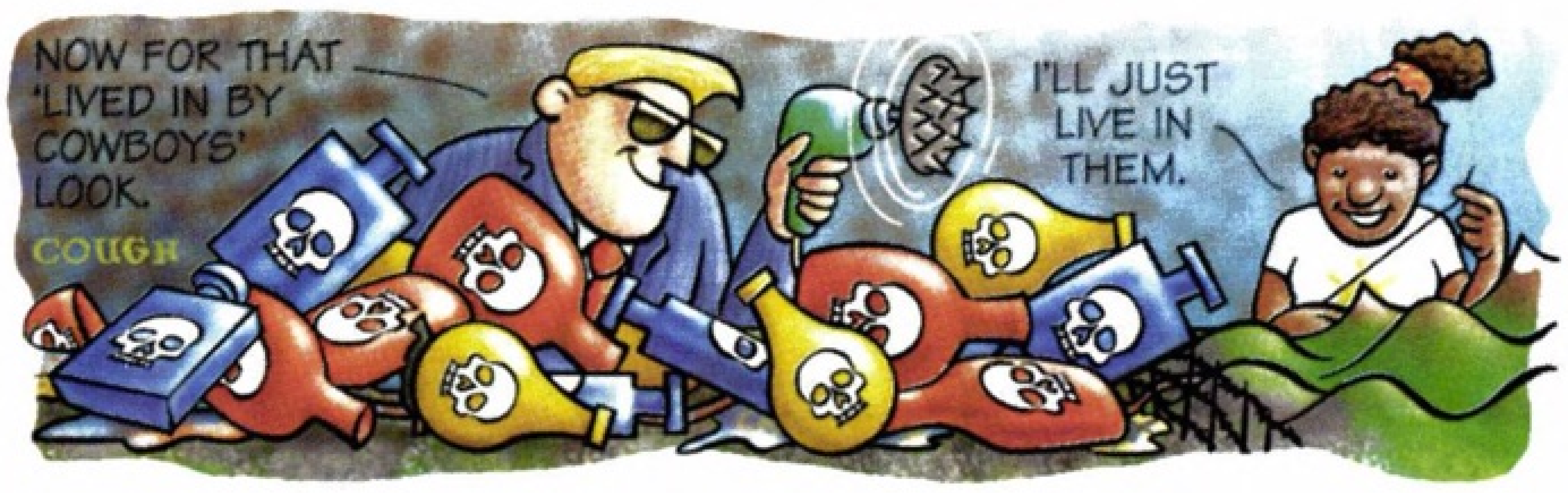
Cotton can grow naturally in most shades of green and brown, eliminating the need for dyeing altogether.

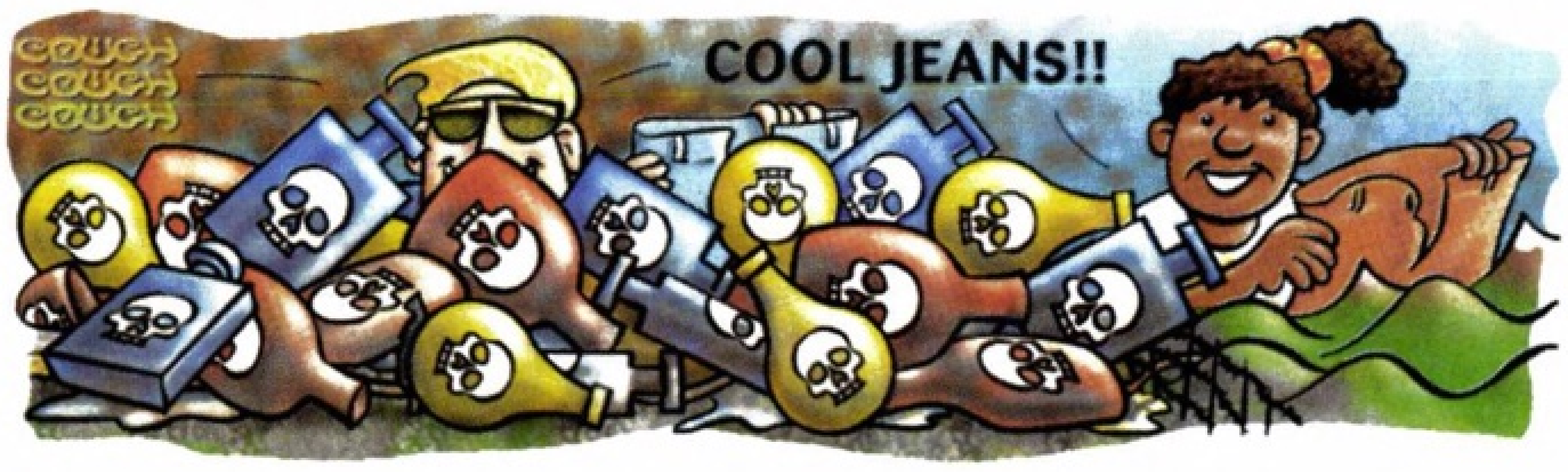
Weaving

Industrial textiles need cheap energy and chemicals for the spinning of the thread, the weaving and treatment of the fabric and the application of special finishes.

'Green' industrial methods remain to be developed and may be a contradiction in terms – people who tread lightly on the earth still spin, design and weave their own fabrics from local fibres and dyes.


THIS MAKES CLOTH LOOK REALLY GOOD.
COUGH COUGH


NOW FOR THAT 'LIVED IN BY COWBOYS' LOOK.
COUGH
I'LL JUST LIVE IN THEM.


COUGH COUGH COUGH
COOL JEANS!!

Styling

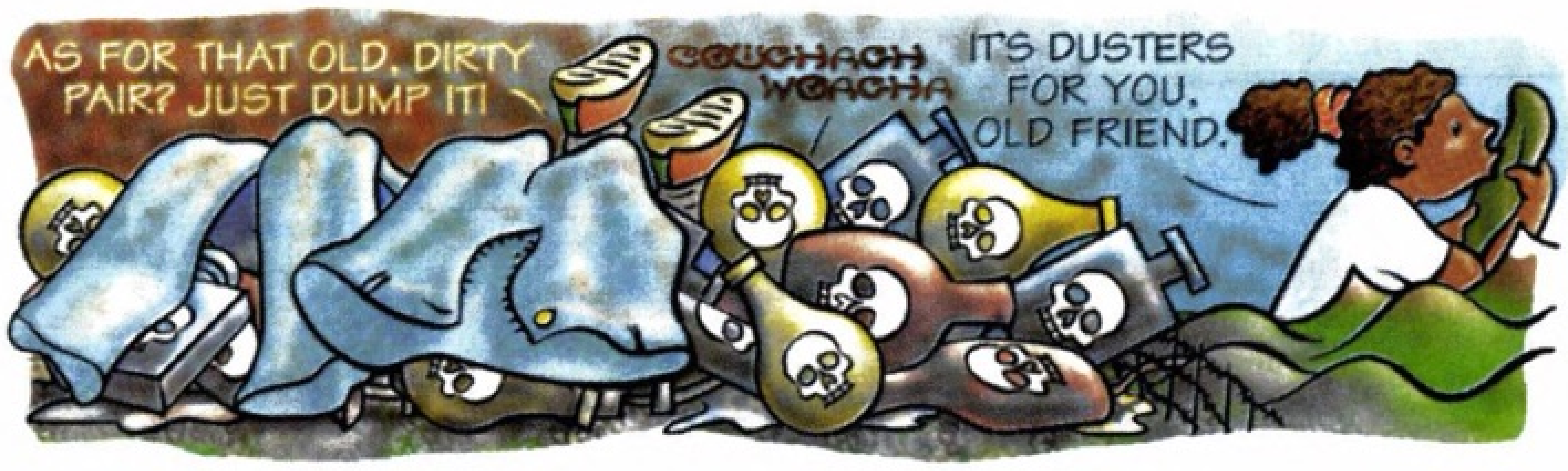
The extraction of pumice for 'stonewashing' lays waste to the places where it takes place, as does the mining and refining of copper for rivets and fastenings. 'Bio-active' detergents for domestic washing pollute water supplies.

Faded jeans are fake and rivets are a fad, no longer necessary to strengthen a garment originally designed for miners. Scrubbing with soap is laborious but a genuine way of 'customizing' if you must.

Dumping

Some waste cotton fibre, thread and fabric is recycled by the industry or used in other products such as paper. But chemical treatments make the fibre difficult to recycle and less bio-degradable.

Jeans need never be thrown away. Patched or bought second-hand, they can be used until the fibre disintegrates – when the rags can be recycled.


AS FOR THAT OLD, DIRTY PAIR? JUST DUMP IT!
COUGHACH WOACHA
IT'S DUSTERS FOR YOU, OLD FRIEND.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIC JONES

Benign urine

Industrial cotton is the world's favourite – and most polluting – fabric fibre. As **David Hecht** reports from Senegal, small farmers have good reason to seek out 'eyes-on' methods for growing the raw material of denim. Research by **Georges Badiane**.

Hands-on sorting of cotton in Mali, West Africa (below); pouring on the pesticides in India (right).

BETTY PRESS / PANOS

EVERY day Dass Sangare collects the urine of his seven cows. 'It's not exactly a pleasant job,' he says, sitting in the shade beside his hut surrounded by one-and-a-half hectares of cotton. 'They usually go in the morning just before they're milked. If you don't get a bucket under them in time you miss most of it.'

Sangare then leaves the urine to ferment for a few days, dilutes it with water and sprays it over his cotton plants. 'It's one of the best insecticides there is,' he says. 'It's also a herbicide and fertilizer, and its free.'

Most important, the urine repels whiteflies (*bemissia tabacci*) which in 1997 were responsible for a 36-per-cent fall in Senegal's cotton production. Most Senegalese farmers spray their cotton with substances like Politrine N, Tamaron 400CE, Sherpa Monochrotophos, Nivacron and Asodrine. None have worked. 'If they would just spray cow urine once a week,' says Sangare, 'their whiteflies would go away.'

Organic-cotton farmers have had yields of up to 1.8 tonnes per hectare – almost double the national average – with no whiteflies. Helped by a non-governmental organization, Enda-Pronat, more than 500 cotton farmers around the village of Koussanar (in the region of Tambacounda, southeast Senegal) last year stopped using any chemicals to protect their crops. 'And more want to convert. We just don't have the support system,' says Mohamedoun Ag Mohamed Abba, an Enda-Pronat agronomist.

Abba says farmers don't just stop using chemicals – they have to have a whole new approach. 'You can't get around the fact that soils and plants need help,' he says. 'The difference is that conventional, chemical methods attempt to transform fields into controlled environments, eliminating everything that does not maximize the growth of one plant. Organic methods, on the other hand, focus on using elements in the environment to promote the natural health of the selected plant, so that it effectively resists insects, weeds and diseases.'

To see a dramatic demonstration of the results of organic methods, farmers just take a short walk down a dirt track leading away from Koussanar. There are two of Abba's experimental cotton fields next to each other, only one of which is sprayed with cow urine. The plants on one are bright and bushy-green; on the other they are grey and straggly. It is hard to believe they are the same species.

'Minerals like iron, potassium and magnesium in urine act as fertilizer, while its acidity kills newly sprouting weeds,' says Abba. But he admits research is not conclusive on why only the urine repels whiteflies. 'It seems a hormone in the cow urine is the active ingredient,' he says. 'We're also finding that the urine of female goats and sheep works – and even the urine of women has similar properties.' Women's urine has the advantage that it is easier to collect.

The secret of Koussanar's success is more than just urine. Potions are made from an unlikely array of raw materials – burnt animal bones, wood ash, chilli powder, garlic and the leaves, roots and fruits of dozens of local plants. One of the most remarkable is a plant called *neem*, which is abundant in much of sub-Saharan Africa and is used extensively by African herbalists to cure everything from malaria to dandruff. Recent experience of *neem* in the West has confirmed what traditional healers have known for centuries. The farmers in Koussanar use *neem* to make insect repellent from the leaves and nuts, and fertilizer from the nut shells.

Such techniques were largely replaced in Africa after 1945, when Western chemicals became readily available even to poor peasant farmers. For decades Senegal's Government marketing board, SODEFITEX, has given chemicals to cash-crop farmers on condition that they sell their produce back to the board. The cost of the chemicals is then deducted from their profits from the harvest, at times leaving them with nothing.

Alternatives to growing cotton with chemicals were all but forgotten in Africa until 1993, says Abba. Now organic-cotton production has also begun in Benin, Tanzania, Mozambique, Uganda and Zimbabwe, with plans for Ghana and Mali as well. Organic cotton still only amounts to 0.08 per cent of all the cotton in the world, but that figure is on the rise, says N'Gone Toure, a co-ordinator at Enda-Pronat: 'More importantly, a few years ago the experts said it was impossible to avoid artificial inputs. Now many are changing their mind.'

Still, an estimated $7 billion-worth of pesticides – about 25 per cent of all insecticides in the world – are sprayed on cotton

Pesticide suicide

***Radhakrishna Rao** records an ironic end to a tragic episode in India.*

HARTMUT SCHWARZBACH / STILL PICTURES

As many as 60,000 small farmers in the region of Andhra Pradesh, southern India, have taken to farming cotton instead of food crops. Some 20 of them have recently committed suicide by eating lethal doses of pesticide.

Most of the farmers are extremely poor. Attracted by cheap loans from pesticides traders and the prospect of a quick buck, they borrowed heavily to raise cotton on small plots of land.

Whitefly, boll weevils and caterpillars multiplied and destroyed their crops, despite the constant application of pesticides. The average yield of cotton fields in Andhra Pradesh fell by more than half in just one year. Now the farmers are in no position to repay the loans or feed their families.

The suicide of Samala Mallaiah in Nagara village grabbed media headlines. He owned one acre of land, leased two more and grew cotton on all three. After making a loss in the first year, he leased yet more land in an attempt to recover. Confronted with falling prices, mounting debts and pest attacks, he committed *harakiri*. 'Cotton has given us shattered dreams,' said one old farmer in Nagara village.

Nearly half the pesticides used in India go into protecting cotton, the most important commercial crop in the country. However, pests have shown increased immunity to a range of pesticides. Last year there were heavy crop losses due to leaf-curl, which is caused by the dreaded whitefly. This nondescript, milky-white fly sucks sap from the cotton leaves, making them curl and dry up. The fly struck first in Pakistan and north-western India. Then it turned south.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, the crop losses and destruction in Andhra Padresh arose from the repeated application of excessive amounts of chemicals – a practice actively encouraged by pesticides traders.

Radhakrishna Rao is a freelance journalist based in Bangalore.

every year, with the fastest-growing markets in the least-developed world. According to Ousmane Boye, an official at the pesticide department of Senegal's ministry for agriculture, some of the chemical insecticides and fertilizers imported into Senegal from Europe and the US last year are restricted or banned in their country of origin. 'The most dangerous are active ingredients which have monochrotophos and metamidophos,' he says. Both of these organo-phosphates are known to have serious, long-term effects on human health.

For every one dollar spent on alternatives, $4,000 are spent on new chemical products

Even chemicals that are available in the West are sometimes hazardous. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, 107 active ingredients in pesticides still used in the US are carcinogenic and 14 are known to cause reproductive problems in animals. 'But they are even more dangerous in Africa, as they are often used improperly,' says Boye, pointing out that most African farmers are illiterate and cannot read instructions on the bottles. 'They often overdose because they have no idea what they are dealing with,' he says. While Africa imports only four per cent of the world's chemical pesticides and fertilizers, there are more accidents with them here than anywhere else in the world.

Even without accidents, Boye says, poor farmers in developing countries are likely to be affected more by chemical pesticides than farm workers in the West. 'Peasants mostly live where they spray,' he says. There are no statistics on Africa, but US farm workers are the occupational group most at risk of chemical-related illness, according to the US Bureau of Statistics. Rarely are their homes in the middle of the fields, as in Africa. 'Clearly the risks are greater for African farmers,' he says.

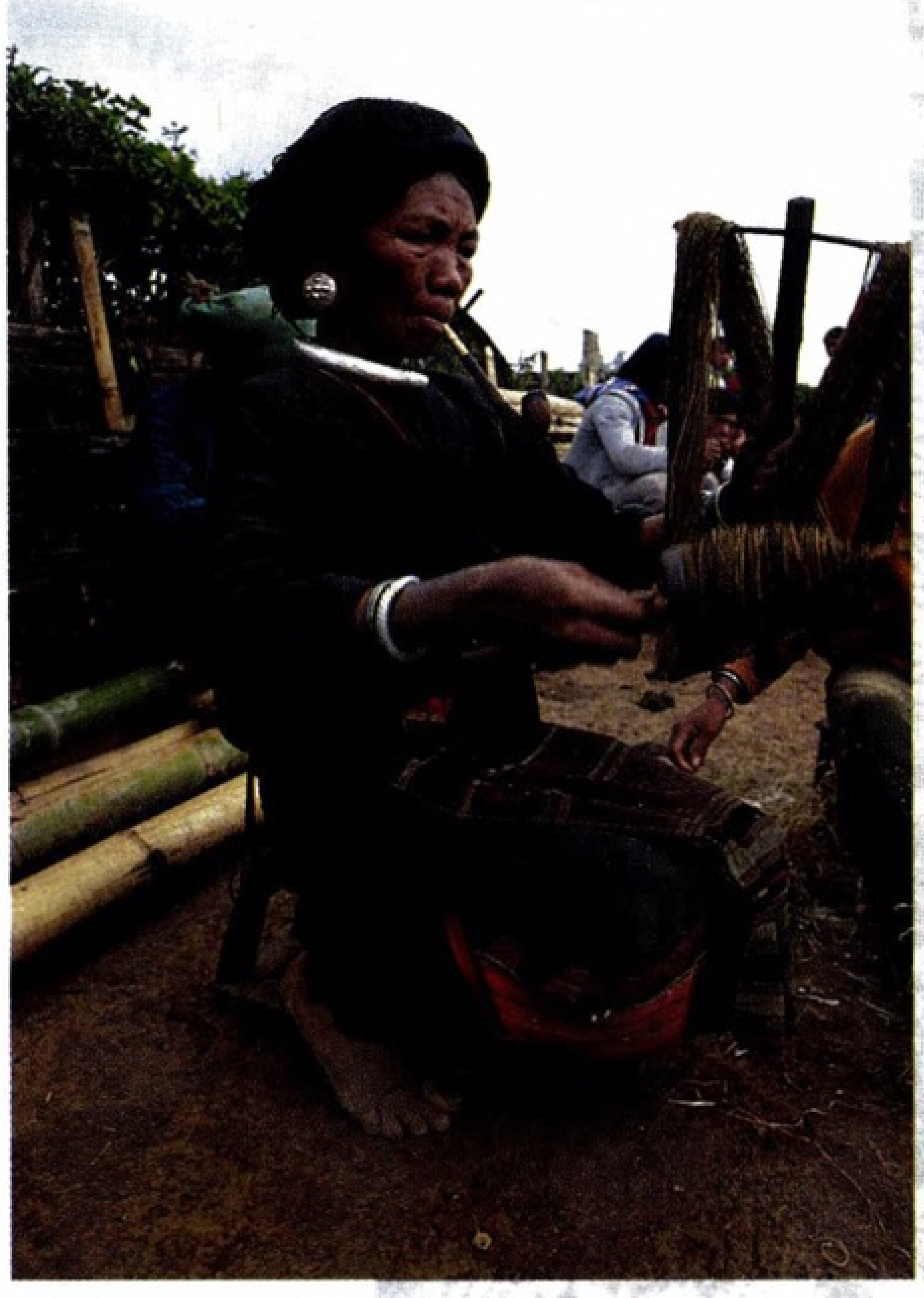
Sangare tells some revealing tales. 'We would try to escape the fumes by going indoors, but they would still seep in,' he says. His roof is made of straw and his windows are just openings in the mud walls. 'The children got skin rashes and breathing problems,' he adds. Often his domestic animals got sick after a spraying. 'One time two of my cows started foaming at the mouth and their stomachs bloated up. After two days they were dead.' Many other people in the area tell of an increase in 'tuberculosis', from which some villagers have died. According to Toure, they really died of lung cancer.

Yet few Senegalese cotton farmers are even aware of alternatives to chemicals. The chemical industry and officials from the Government rarely encourage them to find out. They use the argument that organic methods are not scientifically proven. Boye, though acknowledging the dangers of chemical pesticides, is not convinced they offer a complete alternative at present. 'If Senegal is to compete on the global market, we cannot be using local methods that have not been properly researched,' he says.

Advocates of organic farming admit he has a point. 'We know organic solutions work,' says Abba. 'There just hasn't been enough research yet to determine exactly what farmers should be using and when they should be using it.' For every one dollar spent on researching new biological alternatives, $4,000 are spent on a new chemical products, according to the US-based organic-cotton organization, Simple Life.

Sackcloth and élan

***Kate Fletcher** explains why there's more to hemp than a load of old rope – and no, setting fire to it won't bring a nice surprise.*



RHODRI JONES / PANOS

Hemp's environmental credentials are indisputable. It grows better in organic systems than in conventional ones. It smothers weeds and controls pests, clearing the land for other crops. It improves the structure of the soil, with strong roots to prevent erosion. If processed in the field, it returns nutrients to the land and purports to 'clean up' soil contaminated with heavy metals. It is one of a minority of textile-fibre crops that can be grown in temperate climates. What is more, the fibre is durable. In sixteenth-century England King Henry VIII even passed an Act fining farmers who failed to grow it. So why, given its potential, is so little hemp used today?

There are three main reasons. The first is that the market has been completely overwhelmed by cotton and synthetic fibres. The second is *cannabis sativa*, the recreational drug derived from hemp, which has made the cultivation of the plant illegal in many parts of the world. However, plant breeders have developed varieties which are low in the psycho-active compound, Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), and farmers are beginning to grow these varieties under special licence.

The third and main reason is the process of extracting fibre from the plant's stem, or 'retting'. In conventional treatments this process uses natural bacteria and fungi, or chemicals which break down the pectins that bind the fibres to the stem. Traditionally this is done in water. It can also be done by simply lying the crop on the ground, or 'dew retting', which is preferable from an environmental perspective. But it depends on the right cocktail of heat and moisture and can take anywhere from one to six weeks. The weather's unpredictability makes this risky – farmers can easily lose their whole crop. Other retting techniques are being developed, but few have been perfected.

In conventional processing the stems are kept parallel throughout harvesting, retting and subsequent cleaning, but the mechanical method tangles the fibre up. The difference is crucial: only by keeping the stems aligned can a fine yarn and high-quality fabric be gained. Short fibres make a coarser, more rigid fabric, which perhaps is the reason why hemp is stereotyped as 'sackcloth'.

Market image is all-important. Most designers will either not have heard of hemp, or know of its associations with the drug culture, or think its only use is for sacking. If garment producers realize the potential of hemp, and processing techniques are refined, hemp could begin to fulfil its promise as a local, environmentally responsible textile fibre with distinctive élan.

Kate Fletcher is a researcher in textiles/environment/design issues at Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, England.

COURTESY OF DAVID HECHT

The cotton farmers of Koussanar: learning from mistakes and escaping from chemicals (above); the heritage of hemp in China (left).

The biggest problem is dosage. Potency of the raw organic materials varies, depending on conditions. Researchers at the Institute for Agronomic Research in Senegal have found, for example, that the potency of *neem* changes with climate and soil conditions. The chemical composition of cow urine varies according to the age and diet of the cow. 'If the mixture is too strong, the acid will kill the plant,' says Abba. 'If it's too weak, it just doesn't work.'

Some organic solutions pose health risks. Chilli powder is an excellent insect repellent but it causes serious skin and eye inflammations. Spraying urine – particularly human urine – can be unhygienic. Other substances can be deadly. According to Abba, farmers at Koussanar had been extracting a white rubbery liquid from a plant called *Darboguel*. 'It kills not only insects but animals and humans. One time, after spraying near a creek, all the fish died and floated to the surface. We no longer recommend that peasants use it,' he said.

Abba admits his own experiments have sometimes gone wrong. 'Last year I was trying out different rates of dissolving *neem* into water and I let the solution ferment. When the farmers sprayed it on their plants, instead of repelling the insects it attracted them. The crop was almost wiped out. I felt terrible.'

But from the failures we learn, says Abba. 'Sometimes it's just best to leave the insects be. A cotton field is an insect-eat-insect world. If the plants are naturally healthy they can withstand a lot. You just need an "eyes-on" approach, to catch potential problems early.'

The farmers at Koussanar seem prepared to take the risk. The financial risks of organic methods are actually fewer. 'Before, when our crops went to market, much of the profits went to the Government,' says Demba Sy, who turned to organic-cotton farming two years ago. 'I don't yet know how much money I will make this year. But, however much it is, it will all be mine.'

The main expense is the spraying equipment they share, and buying the cotton seeds, which cost less than $2 a hectare. Chemical pesticides, on the other hand, average about $20 a hectare and have to be applied at least six times a season – in extreme cases as often as thirty times. 'Sometimes we had bumper harvests and still made less than $100 for a year's work,' says Sy.

An added attraction of organic cotton is that its price is better – 30-per-cent more than conventional cotton. There is increasing demand for it from health-conscious consumers in Europe and the US. Research suggests that conventional cotton retains a residue of chemicals: airborn fibres may cause lung cancer, while physical contact with the residues may increase the chances of skin blemishes and cancer. 'In Europe, manufacturers of organic-cotton products can't get enough of it,' says Jacques Deffour, head of la Cotonnière Cap Vert, Senegal's main organic-cotton exporter. 'I think it could become an important foreign-exchange earner for Senegal.'

Currently the US is the largest producer of organic cotton, but small-scale farmers could have an advantage on global markets – overheads are lower because the organic raw materials are freely available all around them.

The farmers do face obstacles in making the conversion. Eliminating all chemicals from a field takes two-to-three years. For the cotton to be certified as organic, a representative from the European-based organization ECOCERT must come out and submit the soil and plants to rigorous testing.

Those who have undergone the conversion say it was worth it. Surveying his land, Sangare cites a Wolof proverb: '*Ku buge de wekhu*' – which means: 'How sad it is that people only change when their life depends on it.' He admits farming is now more difficult. 'To solve our problems we can no longer just go to the store and buy a bottle of pesticide. But our land is healthier – and so are we.' ■

David Hecht is based in Dakar, Senegal, where he is a correspondent for National Public Radio in the US, the BBC, *Newsweek*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *The Economist* and *New Republic*. **Georges Badiane** is his research assistant.

PESTICIDES ACTION NETWORK

PAN is a coalition linking over 400 citizens' groups in some 60 countries in opposition to the misuse of pesticides and in support of safe, ecologically sound alternatives. Contact the Regional Centre nearest you:

Africa: PAN Africa, BP 15938 Dakar-Fann, Dakar, Senegal; Tel/fax: +221 25 29 14,
e-mail: panafric@sonatel.senet.net

Asia/Pacific: PAN Asia and the Pacific, PO Box 1170, 10850 Penang, Malaysia;
Tel: +60 4 657 0271; Fax: +60 4 657 7445, e-mail: panap@GEO2.poptel.org.uk

Europe: PAN Europe, c/o The Pesticides Trust, Eurolink Centre, 49 Effra Road, London
SW2 1BZ, UK; Tel: +44 171 274 8895, Fax: +44 171 274 9084, e-mail: pesttrust@gn.apc.org

Latin America: RAAA, Mariscal Miller No 2622, Lince, Lima, Peru;
Tel/Fax: +51 14 404 359, e-mail: postmaster@raaa.org.pe

North America: PAN North America Regional Center, 116 New Montgomery, #810,
San Francisco, CA 94105, USA; Tel: +1 415 541 9140, Fax: +1 415 541 9253,
e-mail: panna@panna.org

What jeans mean is now more important than what they are.

McKenzie Wark explains.

The post

It's strange how an idea as contradictory as 'designer jeans' comes, after a while, to seem quite normal. Jeans are a practical garment that made their way into the quite impractical world of the post-war fashion system. Right alongside Tiffanys and other designer brands on New York's classy Fifth Avenue sits an outlet for Levi's jeans. In this paradox lies one of the most striking changes in the shape of the fashion industry.

Jeans are a garment that puts together the ingenuity and resources available in the US at the time of the civil war. This very large-scale conflict was the incentive for the industrialization of a good many work processes. The first example of what we would now recognize as mass-production techniques was for civil-war firearms. The need for military uniforms led to similar techniques being used for clothing, and to a system of standard sizes that is still with us today.

Fashion and clothing were – and to some extent still are – a modern, industrialized system with two distinctive rhythms of production and consumption. Whatever people wear until it wears out is clothing. Whatever people wear until a new style comes along is fashion. Jeans were once clothing rather than a fashion garment, until something happened to them that was part of a whole shift in the workings of the fashion system. Where a style would usually pass down the fashion system, jeans were one garment style that moved up.

Think of a classic image from the US of the 1950s in which jeans figure. James Dean or Marilyn Monroe are likely to come to mind. Actually, these Hollywood stars were not the first to borrow this lowly garment and use it as a sign of style rather than as a practical garment. The fashion career of jeans probably starts with subcultures on the fringes of American society such as the 'rough trade' side of male homosexual life and the demobilized wartime pilots who took up the motorcycle as recreation.

FASHION CAFE
FASHION CAFE
LONDON

Supermodel Naomi Campbell digs for victory in the style wars.

T. WOOD / CAMERA PRESS

In the 1960s, jeans proliferated as a garment that could appear to its wearer to be a statement against the whole hierarchy of fashion, while in the end fitting quite well into a new kind of fashion order.

Easy Rider was a low-budget film, made on the fringes of the Hollywood system, and it indicated that much the same thing was happening to the movie industry as to the fashion industry. The orderly mass production of cultural artefacts and signs gave way to a much less stable pattern of culture industries without as definite a hierarchy of price and quality. An idea or an image could come out of nowhere and pass into mass popularity.

The cut and colour of denim jeans started to vary seasonally, just like a fashion garment. Here is the beginning of the paradox of the 'postmodern' fashion system. Jeans are functional and cheap to assemble. Yet, in spite of their basic cuts and exposed seams, they can support an elaborate range of meanings.

With 'modern' fashions, the material quality of the garment and its ability to signify fashion and stylishness went together. With 'postmodern' fashion there need be no such connection. What the garment signifies might be quite at odds with its material qualities – as it is in the archetypal case of the blue jean. Much the same gar-

modern pair

ment can support quite a wide variety of meanings with a few minor variations in its appearance.

The 1960s saw a great proliferation of pop culture, as incomes rose throughout the developed world and more and more people went looking for something on which to spend their disposable income. This was both a good time and a bad time for mass manufacturers of a clothing item like blue jeans. Rising incomes meant more purchasing power and a bigger market, but it also meant rising costs. While the production of the fabric lends itself to automation and to economies of scale, some parts of the cutting and assembling of garments do not.

To make matters worse, the 1960s also saw an explosion of small-scale manufacturers and retailers who took advantage of the vast expansion of pop culture to market a bewildering array of ever-changing styles. Big manufacturers often found it hard to keep up. The aura of style created around the blue jean by Hollywood and Western pop culture did not end at the borders of the US. The names Levi Strauss and Wrangler found their way onto the behinds of people living far from the badlands of American life from which the garments allegedly arose.

The proliferation of pop culture, with its unpredictable style shifts, its valuing of cheap materials, its multiple-entry points for new expressions of style, was a difficult time for the mass manufacturers. Such a basic garment was easily copied, even counterfeited, in the developing world. Moving production there might have lowered costs, but it also created an industry that could quickly duplicate such a basic commodity.

The point of the whole process is to make a basic garment as cheaply as possible

One response was to absorb jeans fully into the bottom end of the fashion system, with annual variations in styles, with decorative stitching, choice of colour, distinctive ranges for men and women, extremes of cut such as the flare and even the zipper on the back – a shortlived innovation of the 1970s. The point of these changes was the effort by the big manufacturers to stay one jump ahead of imitators. Ironically, just as big firms like Levi Strauss benefited from the circulation of images, so their imitators benefited from the advertising campaigns, which promoted the idea of the garment as much as any particular brand. Hence the continual efforts to distinguish products made by the leading brands.

Another change ushered in during the 1970s was the adoption of the garment by formerly high-status designers much further up the old fashion chain. The mass manufacturers had trouble adapting to the unpredictable tastes of pop culture before cheaper imitators caught up. But things were getting just as hard for the more up-market designers, who once had a secure lock on élite tastes.

The high-fashion houses responded by licensing their own names to less-than-the-best-quality goods, including designer jeans. And so, in the 1980s, jeans appeared with the names of European design houses on them. These garments often had little to do with the designers who owned the trade mark, which would simply be licensed to a mass manufacturer. The design houses came to depend on licensing fees – particularly for perfumes but also for products like jeans – to offset the rising cost of exclusive lines and the extravagant marketing they required. The production of élite-design products became less a business in itself and more a way of generating a mass market for the brand. One might not be able to afford an Armani suit or Versaci dress, but there might be a subsidiary line marketed as a cheaper alternative.

While the élite brands cashed in on the value of the sign that is their label by moving it discreetly down market, pop culture was also throwing up its own kind of style élite. It isn't just the subcultural credibility of Levi Strauss that can be copied: so too can the aura of style of a high-fashion house. Designers such as Calvin Klein and Donna Karan built names for themselves in ready-to-wear clothing that could then be marketed as a sign of certain kind of style and taste, which in turn could be branded onto the seat of a pair of jeans.

The designer jean also incorporates a third phenomena – the mass marketers who decided to differentiate their product by setting up several apparently distinct labels, each with their own house style and target market, but sharing the same manufacturing, distribution and accounting systems. So besides the high-class label moving down market and the streetwise label moving up in the world, there is the mass-market label moving sideways. The Gap and Banana Republic are basically variations on the same corporate structure, but tailored to different niches in the world of brands.

In all of these cases, what you will find are basic garments that all meet at least minimum standards of quality and durability, but are in many ways interchangeable. What distinguishes them is not their material qualities, but the signs stitched onto the back pocket, the environments in which they might be sold, and the marketing campaigns that define the range of possible meanings for the sign. This is the paradox of the 'postmodern' fashion world.

The same proliferation of communication that made possible the pop-media world of culture and consumption also enables a fragmented production system. The cotton might come from wherever the exchange rate and the weather is favourable this season. The fabric might be made in a newly industrializing country with high levels of capital and skilled labour, if perhaps rather fewer environmental constraints. The cutting and stitching might be relegated to sweatshops in a less-developed part of the world. The designers, on the other hand, might be close to the New York garment district, where you can also find skilled garment makers who can run up experimental batches for the new-season range. The advertising firm who has the company's account might be nearby on Madison Avenue where suppliers of image-making skills, from hair stylists to photographers, are clustered.

The point of the whole process is to make a basic garment as cheaply as possible and attach it to a sign that conveys just exactly the right range of meanings to just exactly the right range of consumers, who will be happy to walk around with that sign on their backsides. ■

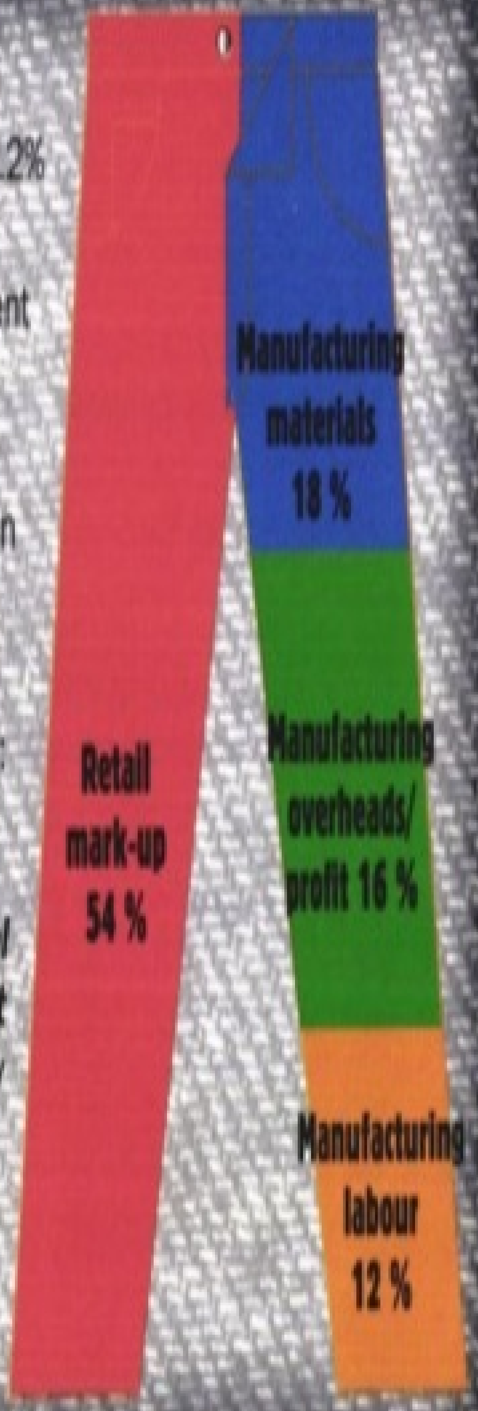
McKenzie Wark lectures in media studies at Macquarie University, Sydney, and is the author of *Virtual Geography* (Indiana) and *The Virtual Republic* (Allen & Unwin).

JEANS – THE FACTS

Jeans are the Coca Cola of clothing – consumed almost everywhere in the world. But they're in trouble – with the environment, with the people who make them, and even with the people who are supposed to wear them.

1 Price

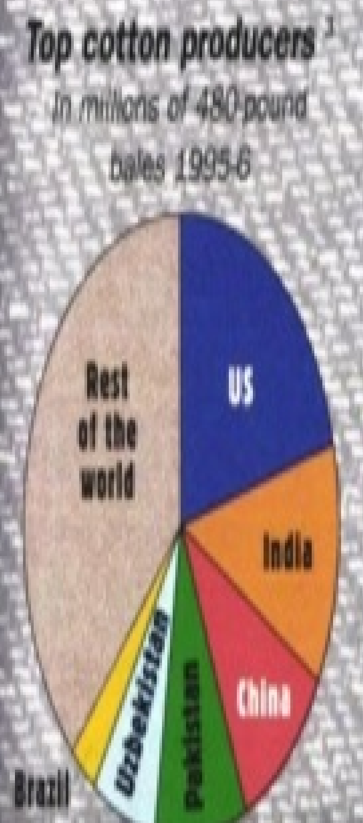
On average, just 12% of the money you spend on a garment like jeans goes to the people who make it. More than half goes to the retailers – the people who sell it:



Share of final garment price, by sector[1]

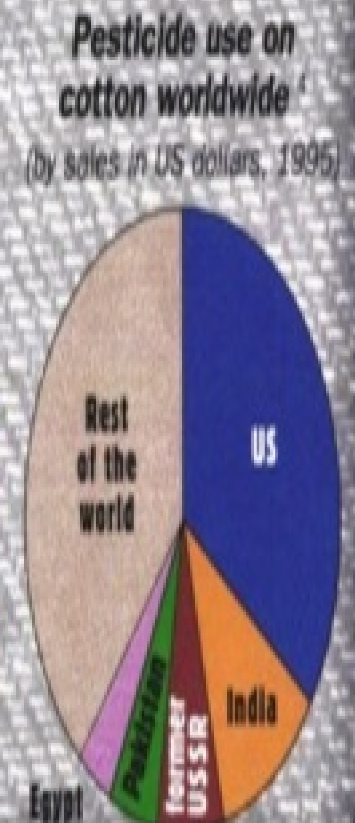
2 Raw material

Denim jeans are made from cotton – the world's most popular fibre, which still provides as much yarn as all the 'modern' artificial fibres put together. Cotton crops cover 34 million hectares of the surface of the earth and use 25% of all the world's pesticides. An estimated one million cases of pesticide poisoning and 20,000 deaths per year are attributable to cotton.[2]



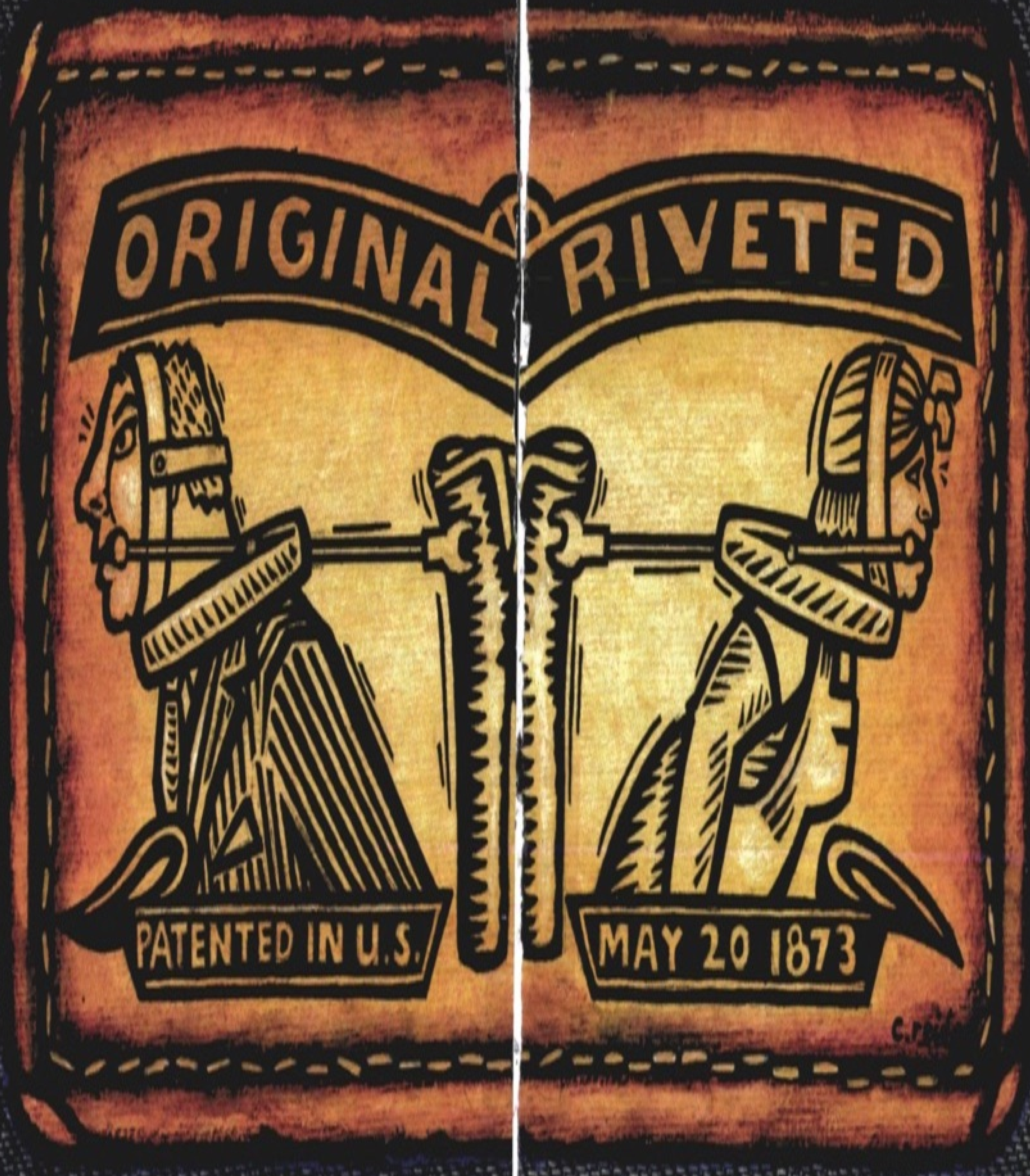
Top cotton producers[3]

In millions of 480-pound bales 1995-6



Pesticide use on cotton worldwide[4]

(by sales in US dollars, 1995)



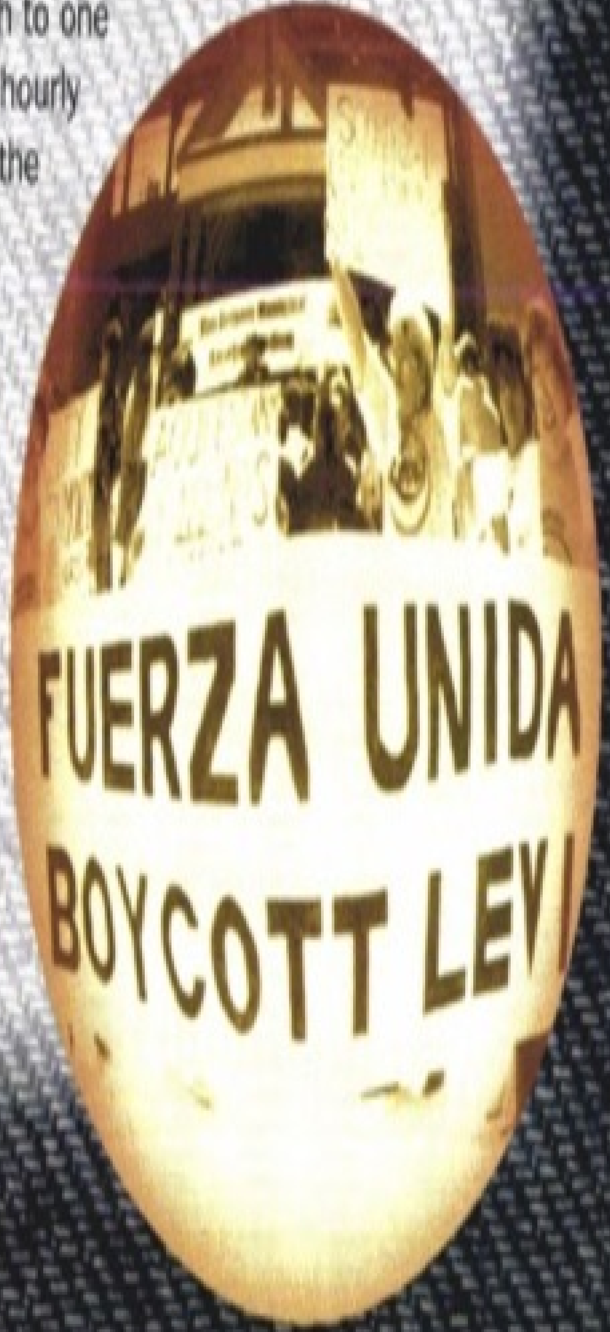
'Jeans have become an American tradition, symbolizi the vitality of the West to people all over the world.'

Printed on the po inside Levi jeans.

4 Stitched-up

Nearly all jeans are stitched together in hundreds of thousands of low-wage 'sweatshops' and private homes around the world:

- You can tell where some of them are by looking at relatively poor countries where jeans are little-worn but large quantities of denim are imported – 48 million metres into Bangladesh, 85 million metres into Turkey in 1996.[6]
- The Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia (TCFUA) estimates that the Australian garment industry now employs 15 people as 'outworkers', usually at home – working an average 14-18 hours a day for less than $2 an hour – for every one factory worker, whose average wage is $9 an hour. Most 'outworkers' are non-English-speaking.[7]
- In 1993 half of all jeans in Australia were locally made; with the reduction of trade tariffs the proportion fell to less than a third by 1997.[7]
- In late 1996 the US-based jeans label Guess? Inc announced its intention to move 40% of its sewing operations from the US to Mexico, Chile and Peru: just 35% of its jeans are now sewn in Los Angeles, compared with 75% in mid-1996.[8]
- Mexican garment workers earn one fifth to one tenth of the hourly rate paid to the 200,000 garment workers across the border in Los Angeles, just 2% of whom are unionized.[8]

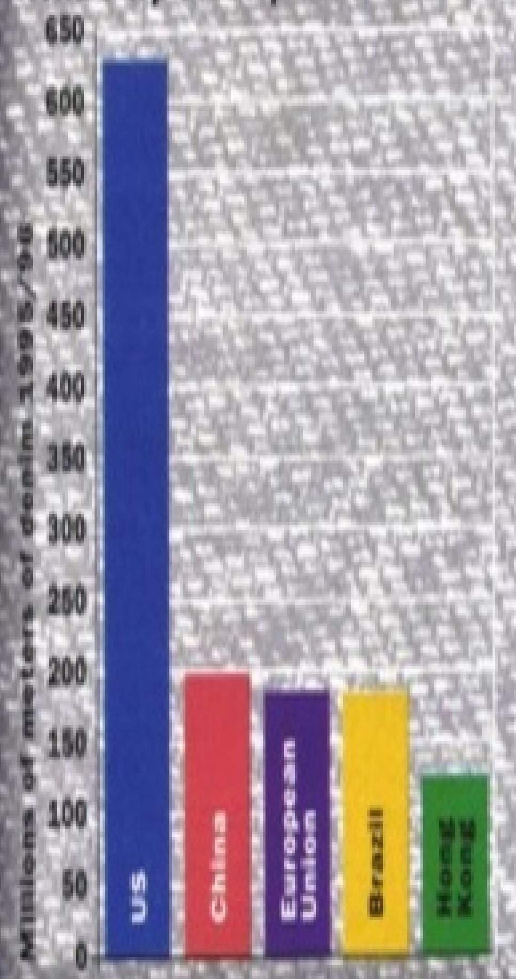


3 Fabric

Denim

A 'heavy' fabric, denim uses large quantities of cotton. So the mills that make it are usually located near to cotton crops.

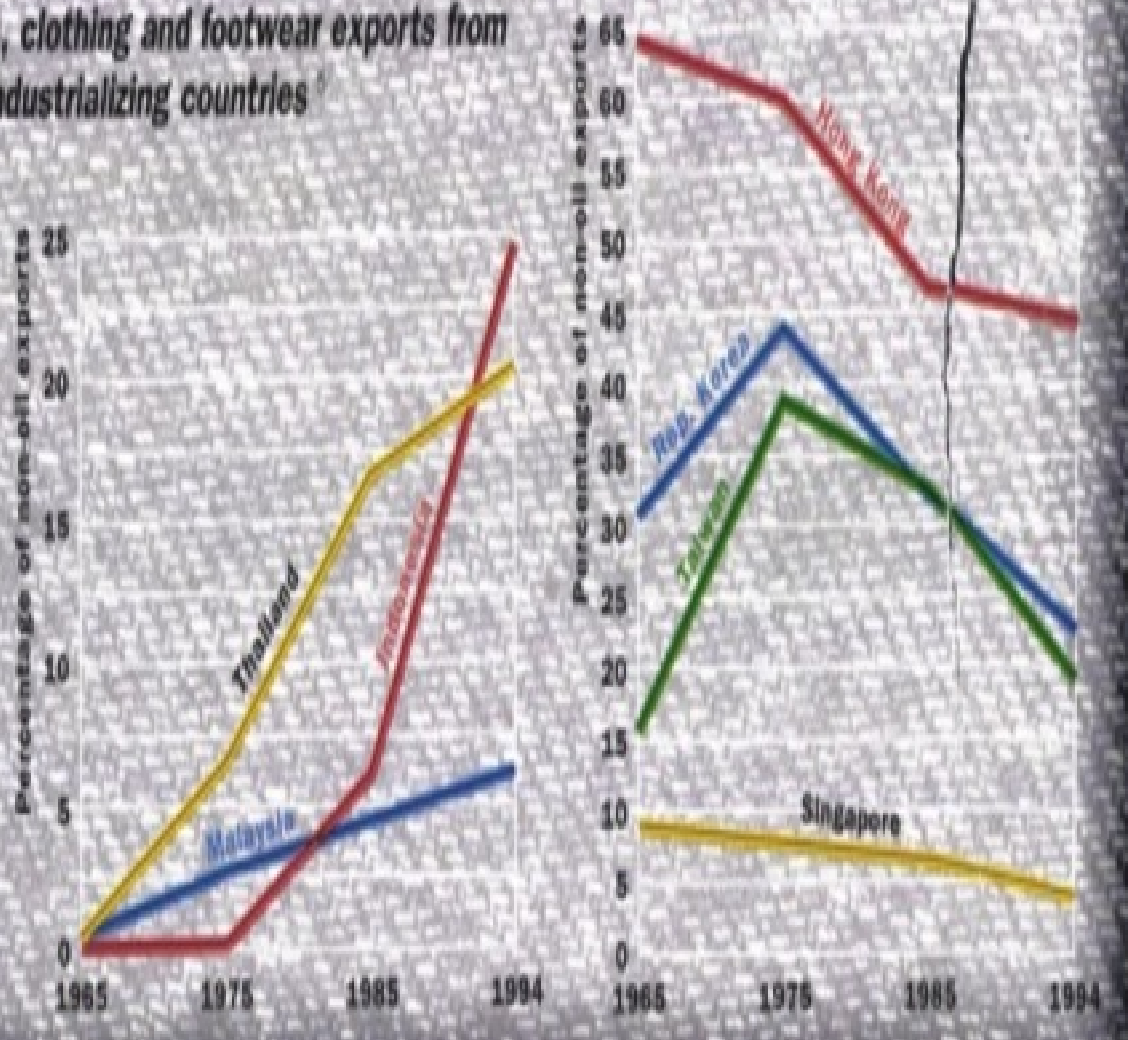
World's top denim producers[6]



Textiles and industrialization

The Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) of Asia began by exporting textiles and clothing. First in Hong Kong, Korea and Taiwan, then in Indonesia and Thailand – Singapore and Malaysia are exceptions – big increases in the export of textiles and clothing marked the beginning of 'export-oriented' industrial growth:

Textiles, clothing and footwear exports from newly-industrializing countries[5]



5 Labels

During the 1980s demand for jeans increased on average by 10% a year. Nostalgia – using Marvin Gaye's song *I heard it through the grapevine* – increased Levi 501 sales by 800 per cent. But in the 1990s demand has stagnated or fallen – by 3% in 1997.[10]

HARTMUT SCHWARZBACH / STILL PICTURES

- In 1970 Australians bought 3.5 million pairs of jeans and 1.2 million men's suits; over the next 20 years sales of jeans tripled, while sales of suits fell by more than half.[7]
- Demand for jeans in Australia peaked at 18 million pairs a year in the early 1980s, then fell to 10 million in 1996. Per-capita consumption fell from 1.3 pairs per person in 1993 to 0.9 pairs per person in 1997.[7]
- Every American owns, on average, 7 pairs of wearable jeans.[9]
- San Francisco-based Levi Strauss, the first producer of jeans, is now the world's largest clothing manufacturer. Annual sales are worth $7 billion, 71% of them jeans or jeans-related items, with an annual publicity spend of $300 million in the US and $200 million outside.[10]
- In 1993 Levi Strauss operated 700 plants in 60 countries making 200 different styles of blue jeans alone. Between 1984 and 1997 the company's market value increased 105 times – by almost as much as computer-softwear giant Microsoft.[9]
- Levi's share of the US jeans market has fallen sharply, from 48% in 1990 to 26% in 1997. The VF Corporation, with its Lee, Wrangler and Riders labels, now has a 27% share.[8]
- 'Upscale' designer labels, selling for $100 or more per pair, now account for 10% of market value in the US. Calvin Klein's CK label shot from nowhere in 1993 to take almost half the 'designer' market in 1997.[10]

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1 *No Sweat – fashion, free trade and the rights of garment workers*, ed Andrew Ross, Verso, London 1997. **2** E mental Cotton 200 information, September 1994; and *Ethical Consumer Magazine*, no 50, Dec 1997/Jan 1998. **3** US Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service. **4** Cotton Fact Sheet, Pesticide Action Network, No rican Regional Centre, June 1996. **5** UNCTAD, *Trade and Development Report 1996*. **6** Deutsche Bank Market Survey **7** *The Melbourne Age*, 12 November 1997. **8** Richard Behar, 'Guess', in *Fortune*, 14 October 1996. **9** ultinational Monitor, March 1997 vol 18 no 3. **10** James Surowiecki, 'All in the jeans', in *Slate*, 4 December 1997.

Life on the line

It makes no difference whether you're in San Antonio, Texas or Tehuacán, Mexico – if you're a migrant and a woman who stitches jeans for a living you can be sure of a mean deal. **Miriam Ching Louie** reports on the seamy underside of a nasty business.

FUERZA UNIDA
FUERZA UNIDA!

Fuerza Unida: still strong after all these years, and (inset right) sending the label to Levi's CEO Bob Haas.

Beneath the roller coaster of global styles and markets lies a seismic shift, shaking the lives of the women who stitch jeans together. Women in the developing world, and migrants to the First World, increasingly find themselves working on what feminists have dubbed the 'global assembly line'. Constant restructuring and global integration mean that a ripple at one end of the line can slap women workers like a *tsunami* tidal wave at the other. The experience of Mexican immigrants working for Levi Strauss & Co in San Antonio, Texas, and indigenous migrants in Tehuacán, Mexico, reveals the perils of life and labor along the global denim line.

Fuerza Unida – 'United Force' – is a women-workers fightback organization baptized when Levi Strauss & Co closed down its Zarzamora Street plant in San Antonio, Texas, in 1990 and relocated operations to Costa Rica. The plant was Levi's largest in the US and was not unionized. As the biggest in San Antonio's history, the closure wrought havoc in the community.

Of the 1,150 workers who suddenly found themselves out on the street, 86 per cent were female and 92 per cent Latinos. Many received less than 24-hours notice. Denied useful retraining and other assistance, they lost not only their jobs but their peace of mind.

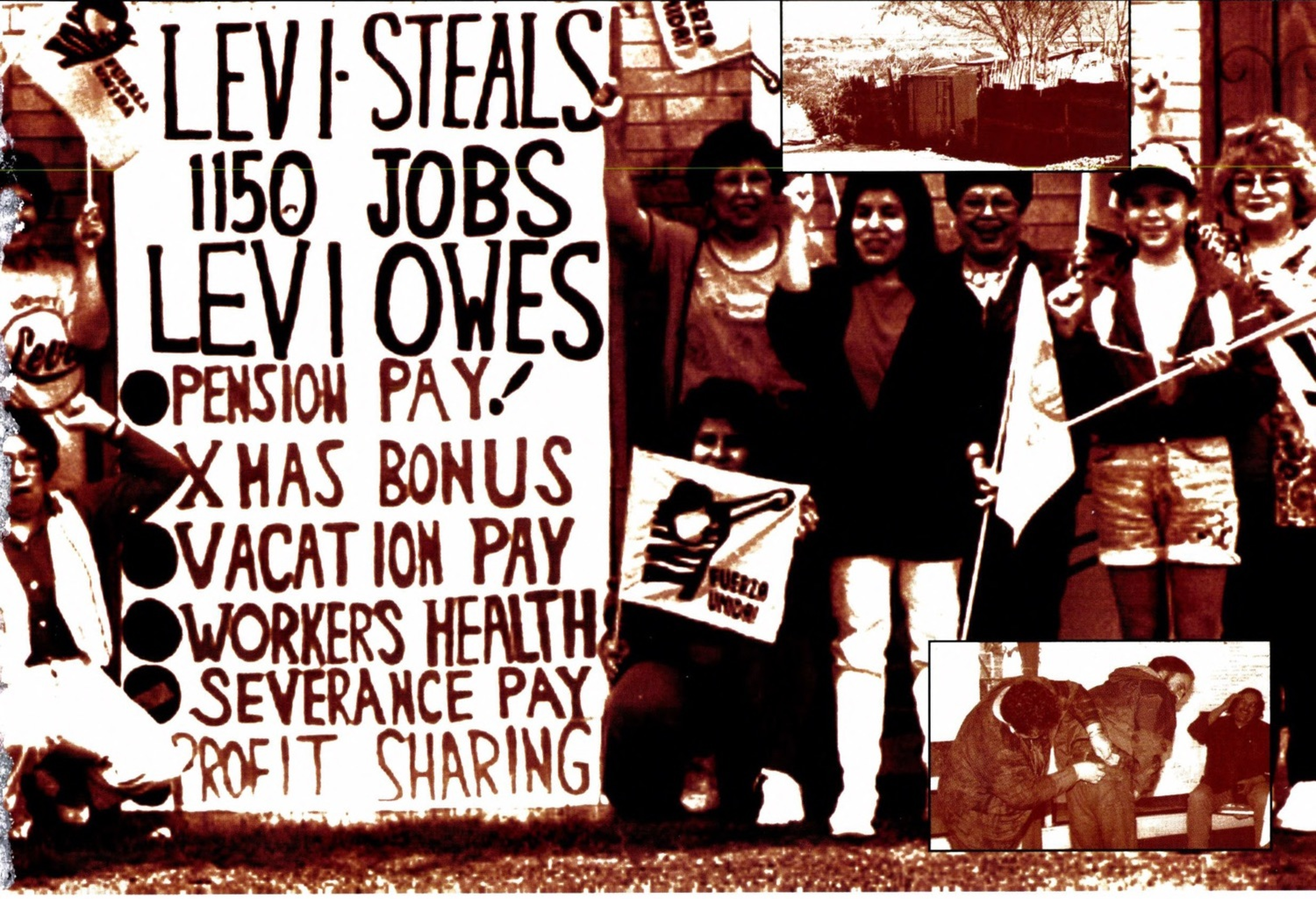
Viola Casares, a co-coordinator for Fuerza Unida, recalls: 'As long as I live I'll never forget how the white man in the suit said they had to shut us down to stay competitive.'

Petra Mata, also a co-coordinator, remembers: 'People screamed, cried, fainted. When you lose your job you feel like nothing but trash, a remnant, a machine to be thrown out. They take away your dignity. You get scared. How are you going to pay for the car, the house, the kids to eat and go to school? *Hijole*! After so many years of working for Levi's, overnight we had nothing.'

Viola, Petra and their co-workers were not the first – or the last – victims of Levi Strauss & Co. Between 1981 and 1990 the company closed 58 plants and put 10,400 people out of work. It shifted about half of its production overseas, where the best-paid seamstresses made about a tenth of the wages of their US counterparts. By 1990 Levi's had 600 subsidiaries and contractors in developing countries around the world, including Costa Rica, Mexico, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, the Philippines, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

Late in 1991 a Levi's contractor in the US Pacific territory of Saipan was accused of keeping imported Chinese women in virtual slavery, confiscating their passports and forcing them to work 84-hour weeks at sub-minimum wages. A contractor in Indonesia who had been given a clean bill of health by a Levi's inspector was found to be strip-searching female workers to determine whether they were menstruating as they claimed and thus were entitled to a day off with pay in accordance with Muslim law. Employees of a former Levi's contractor in Mexico said that at least ten children aged under 14 worked at the plant; workers were laid off for a few days if they went to the toilet 'too often', and rain-water poured through the roof, collecting in puddles and causing electric shocks.

After cutting 1,000 white-collar jobs in February, in November 1997 Levi's announced plans to close 11 of its US plants in Arizona, New Mexico, Tennessee and Texas, employing 6,395 workers – a third of its total manufacturing workforce in the US and Canada. Media reports said the announcement followed a year-long Levi's evaluation of its US plants, yet workers and local public officials were taken completely by surprise. There were union demonstrations in front of Levi's Europe headquarters in Brussels when Carl von Buskirk, CEO of



FUERZA UNIDA

Levi's Europe, said that 'measures – including closures – could be announced in 1998 concerning certain facilities'.

Sylvia Alvarado, a Saint Mary's University student in San Antonio, called her mother to find out how her relatives were taking the closure of the Levi's plants in El Paso. Alvarado said: 'The [plant] nurse told my mother the tears haven't stopped falling. There are problems between husband and wife. People have devoted more than 20 years of their lives to their work, only to realize that their jobs are over.'

Petra Mata says: 'This is the same strategy Levi's use on us – to work you and then throw you away like trash. They have no respect for workers' rights as human beings.'

Fuerza Unida built a workers' center. In addition to waging an eight-year campaign for justice, the group runs a sewing co-operative, food bank and drop-in crisis-and-support center. With the new round of layoffs they have been flooded with calls from Levi's workers from other plants.

Down below the southern states of the US, the Mexican side of the border is now peppered with *maquila* factories producing manufactured goods for export. Once confined to Mexico's northern border with the US, they are popping up deeper inside the country's interior.

Tehuacán, in the state of Puebla southeast of Mexico City, was known principally for its mineral waters until the 1970s, when it began to attract shops that produced garments primarily for the domestic market. But with the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 business began flowing in from the US. The local Human Rights Commission estimates that there are now 60 registered *maquilas* that pay taxes – and up to 500 'underground' shops. *Maquilas* range in size from a handful of workers to over 1,000. Sixty per cent of the industry is denim, with the material usually produced and cut in the US, then shipped to Tehuacán for sewing.

US-based companies, like Guess? Inc, the VF Corporation (Lee and Wrangler), Calvin Klein, Sun Apparel, Ditt and Kellwood contract with local plants to sew their jeans. Sun Apparel produces such labels as Arizona and Hunt Club for JC Penny's, Polo for Ralph Lauren, Fila, Sasson, XXX, Faded Glory, Code Bleu, Real Pro, Todd Oldham and Ellememo, and contracts with several plants in Tehuacán.

Maria and Areceli (not their real names) live in a tiny, single-room shack that is home to nine people. The dirt floor is carefully damped down. Like the many shanty towns of migrant *maquila* workers that have mushroomed on the edges of the city, this *colonia* (neighborhood) has no electricity, running water or sewage system.

The description of their working conditions that Maria and Areceli give to local human-rights workers and a US delegation organized by the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and Highlander Center, adds up to a litany of violations of Mexican labor law. Each shift runs from 8.30am to 8.30pm, but employees must stay longer without pay if they do not finish set production goals. They work straight through Saturdays from 8.00am to 5.00pm without a lunch break. Pay runs from $30 to $50 a week. Girls as young as 12 and 13 work in the factories. Workers are searched when they leave for lunch and at the end of the day to check that they aren't stealing materials. Women are given urine tests when hired and those found to be pregnant are promptly fired.

'As long as I live I'll never forget how the white man in the suit said they had to shut us down to stay competitive'

Recounting management's abusive treatment, Maria suddenly blushes – rather than repeat the curse-words the foreman calls the workers. She says: 'Even if you were dying, the company would never give you permission to leave work.' A week earlier, a worker who had to take half a day

Trucked into work in Tehucán (above left); taking lunch on the streets (top right); Alberta 'Beti' Carino Trujillo (right).

PHOTOS: KIM BOBO / NATIONAL INTERFAITH COMMITTEE FOR WORKER JUSTICE

off when he got sick had been docked a week's pay. Arriving 15 minutes late costs three days' work without pay.

Areceli is a fast stitcher who handles several-hundred pairs of pants a day. She complains about the back-wages owed to workers, and increased levels of stress from high production quotas. She describes the injuries women suffer from working with the heavy denim material, getting punctured by needles and pins, and adds: 'We work without safety glasses and equipment and sometimes the needles break and fly up in our faces.'

When asked what they would do if they had the power to change their working conditions, Maria says wistfully: 'I would work shorter hours.' She would also like to be able just to do her work without being screamed at. Araceli says that she would like to study and wants her children to go to school: 'We are producing high-quality exports, which demand a high skills level. We deserve more money.' When asked what would happen if they requested improvements, Maria shudders: 'They would get rid of you. They'd say: "If you don't like it here, get out! *¡Vete a la chingada!* (Go fuck yourself!)."'

Many of Tehuacán's *maquila* workers are members of the Nahautl, Mixteco, Mazateco and Popoloca indigenous peoples. Recruiters comb the rural regions of Puebla, Veracruz and Oaxaca for people seeking relief from hunger, drought and greedy landlords. The punitive measures that employers use to discipline workers are meant to mold Tehuacán's new industrial workforce. Corporate behaviour reveals the historic racism used against indigenous peoples in the Americas.

Human-rights activist Alberta 'Beti' Carino Trujillo works with Omar Esparza Zarate teaching night school for women workers and their children. She says that in addition to exploitation at the workplace, women in the *colonias* suffer from toxic-waste dumping and water contamination by the *maquilas*, lack of childcare and educational opportunities for their children while they work, domestic and street violence, unwanted pregnancies and high stress levels, especially among single mothers. Beti's own family migrated to Tehuacán from Oaxaca. She says that many of the indigenous people from her region have started to migrate to the US in search of work. She, her mother and siblings spent many years fending for themselves when her father labored as a migrant farmworker harvesting oranges in California.

Father Anastacio 'Tacho' Hidalgo Miramon focuses on the problems of indigenous migrant workers in Tehuacán, and participates in the new Congreso Nacional Indígena (Indigenous National Congress). He explains: 'When people think about repression against indigenous people they only think about Chiapas. But there are over 56 indigenous peoples in Mexico that are being driven from the land, which served as the basis of the social fabric of our communities for centuries. What is happening in Chiapas is happening right here in the Sierra Negra, and in indigenous communities across Mexico.' He warns: 'The Government sees indigenous people as very dangerous. They see Chiapas everywhere. They are using every pretext to build their military bases and paramilitary white guards in our communities. In 1968 it was dangerous to be a student. Now it is dangerous to be an indigenous person.'

Indeed, when some of these human-rights workers visited *maquilas* a few days before our delegation, armed guards put guns to their heads. Workers were petrified their bosses would find out who had talked to us.

About ten years ago *maquila* workers organized an independent union which collapsed after one of the leaders was assassinated. But Beti remains hopeful. She says: 'Although our people are exploited shamelessly, we have a lot of *ganas* (desire), *corazon* (heart), *fuerza* (strength) and *esfuerzo* (courage) to struggle. The *maquilas* treat us bad, but we are here to stay.'

The hip image promoted by the multi-billion-dollar jeans industry belies the treatment of these women. Restructuring and globalization bring injury and layoffs for one set of women workers, militaristic exploitation and the denial of basic human rights to another. But the situation is not hopeless. We know about the dirty underside of the jeans industry because of the courage of women who dare to speak out. They deserve smart shopping sense from consumers and solidarity with their struggle for social justice. ■

Miriam Ching Louie co-ordinates the Women's Education in the Global Economy Project of the Women of Color Resource Center in Berkeley, California, and also media for Fuerza Unida.

Fuerza Unida, 710 New Laredo Hwy, San Antonio, TX 78211, USA; Tel: +1 210 927 2294, Fax: +1 210 927 2295, e-mail: fuerzaunid@aol.com, Web page: www.igc.org/fuerzaunida – calls for supporters to boycott Levi's, Dockers and Slates labels and let CEO Bob Haas know how they feel. Write to Bob Haas, CEO, Levi Strauss & Co, 1155 Battery St, San Francisco, CA 94111, USA; Fax: +1 415 501 8938.

The Human Rights Commission in Tehuacán, c/o National Interfaith Committee for Workers Justice, 1607 W Howard, Suite 218, Chicago, IL 60626, USA; Tel: +1 773 381 2832, Fax: +1 773 381 3345, e-mail: nicwj@igc.org, Web page: www.igc.org/nicwj – urges supporters to pressure jeans companies to follow Mexican labor law and improve conditions; to pressure your governments not to develop trade agreements without strong labor and environmental protection, and to stop all military aid to Mexico.

Greater Texas Finishing Corporation Workers Committee, c/o La Mujer Obrera, PO Box 3975, El Paso, TX 79923, USA; Tel: +1 915 533 9710, Fax: +1 915 544 3730, e-mail: lamujer@igc.apc.org

UNITE!, 1209 E 14th St, Los Angeles, CA 90021, USA; Tel: +1 213 380 8930, e-mail: gcough@uniteunion.org Web page: www.UNITEunion.org

International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation, rue Joseph Stevens 8, 8-1000 Brussels, Belgium; Tel: +32 2 512 26 06, e-mail: 101320.3046@compuserve.com

International Labour Organization, 4, Route des Morillons, CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland.

Code breaking

The rag trade doesn't always get away with bad behaviour. **Bob Jeffcott** and **Lynda Yanz** report on what trade unions and community groups in Canada are doing to bring image-conscious chain stores and labels to book.

It is June 1997, and Rose Cho – at the time Co-ordinator of the Toronto Homeworkers' Association – is modelling an outfit bearing the label of the Woolworth Northern Group. She is taking part in a 'sweatshop fashion show' outside the Eaton Centre, a major downtown shopping mall. As the announcer describes sweatshop conditions, Cho holds up a placard comparing the retail price of $54.90 with the $2.63 paid to the Toronto sewer who made the garments she is modelling.

Later, Cho plays a recording of testimonies from homeworkers in Metro Toronto who have sewn clothes bearing the Woolworth Northern Traditions, Northern Reflections and Northern Getaway labels. Many have received the equivalent of $4.50 an hour – 65 per cent of the minimum wage – some as little as $2.50.

It is August 1995, and 18-year-old Judith Yanira Viera is speaking to a crowd outside a Gap store in downtown Toronto, Canada. Holding up a shirt bearing the Gap label, Viera tells the crowd: 'In Canada, you pay $34 for this shirt. In El Salvador we were paid 27 cents to sew it.'

At a meeting afterwards Viera describes what she endured at the Taiwanese-owned Mandarin International garment factory in El Salvador. An ex-army colonel is the head of personnel and runs the factory like a barracks. If you attempt to organize a union you receive death threats – over 300 of the 800 workers at Mandarin were fired for doing so. If you demonstrate against the sackings you are attacked by company security guards.

Both Viera and Cho are participating in high-profile campaigns that challenge major North American retailers to take responsibility for the conditions in which their garments are produced. Both are working in alliance with unions and religious, women's, human-rights and international-solidarity groups in an attempt to bring these issues directly to North American consumers.

Companies like Woolworth and The Gap don't own the factories or have to deal with the workers that make their products. Instead, they contract out production to free-trade zones in Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and now Africa, and to a chain of small contractors and sub-contractors in developed countries. Although labour costs are much lower in Southern countries, modern 'just-in-time' systems demand that retailers also have access to a cheap, 'flexible' labour force in the North, close to the point of sale.

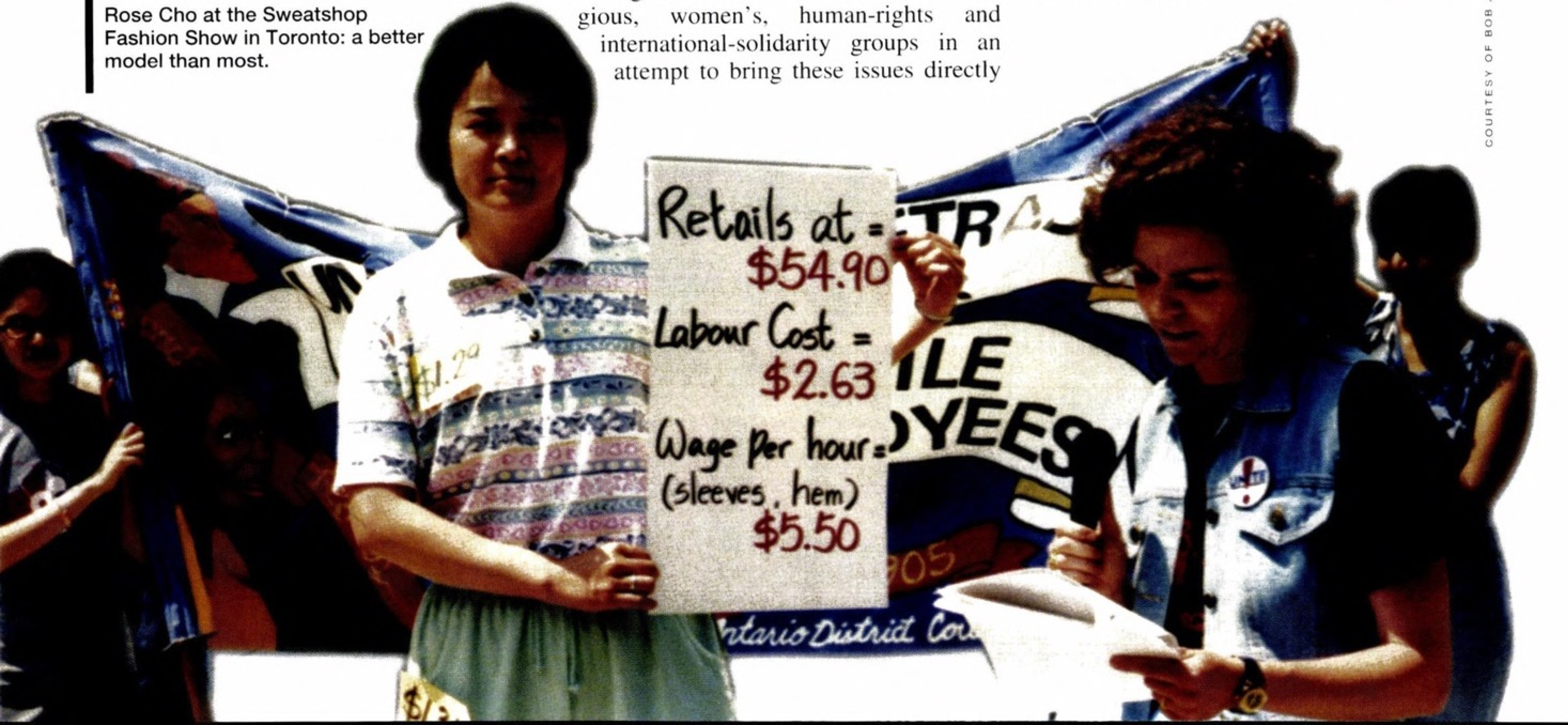
Since the signing of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement the garment industry in Canada, too, has undergone major restructuring. One of the most devastating changes has been the loss of full-time factory jobs. Between 1988 and 1995 more than a third of Canadian garment workers lost their jobs – in the City of Toronto it was a half – as clothing production shifted from unionized factories to small contracting shops and homework.

The majority of homeworkers and contract-shop workers are women who have migrated from precisely those countries to which apparel production has been moving. Having come 'North' for a better life, they find themselves competing with women in the countries they left.

A few powerful retailers can dictate the price and turn-around time for the manufacture of their garments. This means apparel contractors are under constant pressure to lower labour costs. To meet deadlines, they impose strict production quotas and demand excessively long hours of work. Whenever workers organize to achieve a living wage and decent conditions, retailers threaten to shift production to other factories or countries.

In an era when governments everywhere are 'deregulating' to compete for investment, the power of global corporations

Rose Cho at the Sweatshop Fashion Show in Toronto: a better model than most.



COURTESY OF BOB JEFFCOTT AND LYNDA YANZ

Bob Jeffcott at work on the Maquila Solidarity Network.

sometimes seems impossible to challenge. Yet recent consumer campaigns are proving how vulnerable these giant, image-conscious retailers can be.

On 15 December 1995, The Gap responded to public pressure and signed an agreement to allow local independent human-rights groups to monitor the factories that produce its garments in Central America. Like many other retailers, The Gap has a code of conduct for its suppliers. The problem, according to Charles Kernaghan – executive director of the National Labor Committee, which co-ordinated The Gap campaign in the US – was that no worker had ever seen it. 'Before we exposed The Gap's practices in Central America,' he says, 'they hadn't even bothered to translate their code of conduct into Spanish.'

Most foreign investors in Central America's free-trade zones are Korean and Taiwanese manufacturers who produce apparel under contract to major North American retailers and labels. These companies are attracted by easy access to the North American market, benevolent terms of investment offered by Central American countries and by government distaste for unions.

Having come 'North' for a better life, garment workers find themselves competing with women in the countries they left

How can international solidarity possibly be effective in such circumstances?

When we travel to El Salvador's capital city, San Salvador, to attend a conference we are greeted by an article in *La Prensa Gráfica*: 'The arrival of foreign union leaders promoting a boycott of the *maquilas* was confirmed yesterday by immigration authorities.' Despite the newspaper headlines a boycott of the *maquilas* is definitely *not* on the agenda.

The conference is hosted by the El Salvador Independent Monitoring Group, which includes the Human Rights Institute of the Jesuit-run University of Central America (UCA), the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, and the Labour Studies Centre (CENTRA). The meeting aims to assess Mandarin International's conduct after two years of independent monitoring of the code.

'Since the agreement,' says Mark Anner, a former member of CENTRA and the Monitoring Group, 'the worst violations have been rectified. The colonel has been removed from the factory... Women aren't required to present pregnancy tests, nor are they forced to work overtime.' Asked about the remaining problems he replies: 'Independent monitoring in this one factory has been unable to touch the logic of how the industry works, the intensity of the work which is linked to the production goals... The next great challenge is to see to it that all the companies are feeling the same pressure to improve conditions.'

The Gap has conspicuously *not* allowed independent monitoring at any of its other contract factories in over 50 countries around the world. Nor did the company suffer much public criticism when Carmelita Alonzo died of exhaustion from overwork on 8 March 1997 – International Women's Day. Before she died, Carmelita had been working 14 hours a day at a factory in the Philippines producing garments for The Gap and other brand-name retailers. Significantly, the company has not felt the need to participate in the US Apparel Industry Partnership, which is negotiating a multi-company code of conduct and a global monitoring system.

Negotiations between the various 'stakeholders' for multi-company or industry-wide codes of conduct are now underway in the US, the UK, a number of European countries, and at the level of the European Union. In Australia, a voluntary code on homework has been negotiated by unions, retailers and manufacturers, but it only applies to domestic production. In Canada, a broad coalition is demanding a federal task force on sweatshop abuses, which could include discussions on monitoring.

A major concern is how Southern workers can be represented in Northern negotiations and global monitoring systems. On the second day of the conference Sandra Ramos, a member of the Central American Women's Network in Support of Maquiladora Workers, challenges Charles Kernaghan about the negative impact of some Northern campaigns. She charges that the 'buy American' message of the US media coverage has resulted in worker firings and a nationalistic backlash against organizers in Nicaragua. Kernaghan responds that Northern campaigners can't control the US media, but access to the media does allow the stories of Central American workers to reach millions of North American consumers.

We and three women activists from the Mexican border region argue late into the night about on-the-ground organizing. While codes of conduct might be useful in the North, says one of the women, they shouldn't be seen as an alternative to the struggles of *maquila* workers themselves.

One month later the Nicaraguan Minister of Labour, Wilfredo Navarro, signs a proclamation in front of 500 *maquila* workers. It is based on a Code of Ethics developed by the women's network and reportedly signed by 30,000 Nicaraguans. The next day, the owners of all 23 *maquilas* in the Las Mercedes free-trade zone sign an agreement to adhere to the terms of the proclamation, which include guarantees of freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively.

Back in Canada, we want the Government to convene a federal task force on sweatshop abuses both at home and overseas. We want the Woolworth Corporation to take responsibility for what happens in Metro Toronto – and in the Las Mercedes free-trade zone in Nicaragua, where we have now learned that Woolworth has some of its garments made. We'll have to talk with Sandra about how that information can best be used. ■

Bob Jeffcott and **Lynda Yanz** both work at the Maquila Solidarity Network.

RETAIL CAMPAIGNS

NORTH AMERICA

The **Maquila Solidarity Network** acts as the outreach office for the **Labour Behind the Label Coalition**. You can reach both organizations at Popular Education Research Group, 606 Shaw Street, Toronto, Ontario M6G 3L6, Canada; Tel: +1 416 532 8584, Fax: +1 416 532 7688, e-mail: perg@web.net or website: http://www.web.net/~msn

EUROPE

Labour Behind the Label, 38-40 Exchange Street, Norwich NR2, UK, Tel/Fax: +44 160 361 0993.

AUSTRALASIA

National Outwork Information Campaign, c/o Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia, 6th Floor, 377 Sussex Street, Sydney NSW 2000. **FairWear Australia**, Tel: +61 3 9251 5200, Fax: +61 3 9650 4490, email: fairwear@vic.uca.org.au **National Distribution Union**, Private Bag 68, 902 Newton, Auckland, Tel: +64 9 355 1855, Fax: +64 9 355 1850.

GUESS?
jeans

Guess? what

Guess? Inc in Los Angeles are 'trendsetters' in more ways than one. **Sarah Cox** reports on a trade-union faced by a false label.

Somewhere in the world there are 850 pairs of Guess jeans that were sewn in Los Angeles by Maria Eugenia Cruz – a Mexican immigrant and single mother of three – on the day after she had minor surgery to remove a growth on her head. With a bandage and a headache, she was ordered to show up for work at the usual hour of 7.15 in the morning, or risk losing her job.

Cruz worked for Jeans Plus, one of the largest of an estimated 80 contract-sewing shops that made Guess garments in LA. On a good day, fingers flying, she earned an average of $4.68 an hour – seven cents less than California's minimum wage at the time and $1.07 less than today's minimum. Steve Nutter, western states director for the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), says it costs Guess less than $5 in wages to make a pair of jeans that sells for $50 or more.

The only time workers were granted time-off with pay was when the company sent them to anti-union rallies. Guess also gave hundreds of workers paid leave when it rented buses to transport them to its annual shareholder meeting, where the company anticipated a union demonstration. The workers were regaled with fancy food and drink, and given white T-shirts with red hearts that said 'We love Guess'.

A darling of the designer set since it burst into the jeans market in 1981 with skin-tight superfaded denims, Guess' love affair with Americans is wearing thin. Once known for racy advertisements featuring young models in sexually-suggestive poses, Guess is now the target of a growing boycott.

The first hint of trouble came in 1992, when Guess contractors were cited by the US Department of Labor for failing to pay employees the minimum wage or adequate overtime. Faced with litigation, Guess paid $573,000 in back wages.

The promise made by Guess to monitor contractors earned it a coveted spot on the US Department of Labor's 'Trendsetters List'. But even as the company trumpeted its trendsetter status, Guess clothing was discovered in illegal industrial-home operations.

Disgruntled sewers approached UNITE and asked for help. Together, in August 1996, they filed a class-action lawsuit against the company and some of its contractors. Guess was suspended from the Trendsetters List after inspectors found violations at seven contractors. In a settlement supervised by the US Department of Labor, Guess reinstated 20 workers who had been illegally fired and agreed to give them $80,000 in back-pay. Then the company announced it was moving its sewing operations to Tehuacán, Mexico.

Guess' swift move illustrates the difficulties of trying to organize workers in a global economy. In the early 1960s, when the garment industry was booming in the US and sewers were concentrated in large shops, almost a million workers were union members. Now less than 300,000 belong to UNITE, an amalgamation of two garment unions. In California, only 5,000 remain unionized – a quarter of previous membership – and companies like Guess refuse to contract the shops where they work.

The fragmentation of the industry makes it extremely difficult to organize workers. 'Let's say you organize one small factory that makes Guess clothes,' explains Nutter. 'It won't be able to compete against the others and likely would lose the contract. We're trying to organize Guess workers in dozens of factories all at the same time.'

Despite plenty of evidence to the contrary, Guess continues to promote itself as a 'leader in enacting voluntary reforms to end sweatshop labor practices', with the 'strongest program in the industry'. With the boycott eroding 1997 sales, Guess attempted to polish its tarnished image by making high-profile charitable contributions. At Christmas 1997 – when some former sewers were still searching for work – the company partnered with the Los Angeles International Church to feed thousands of poor people and clothe them in trendy Guess garments. Guess also made much of its recent sponsorship of The Freedom Writers, a group of 45 inner-city LA high-school students who write and speak out against discrimination and injustice.

Last December, Guess launched its own 'anti-sweatshop campaign' in an ironic attempt to appeal to conscientious shoppers. The company ran full-page ads in major daily American newspapers claiming that its contractors are 'guaranteed 100 per cent free of sweatshop labor'. After federal authorities protested the ads' suggestion that they had officially certified Guess' production to be sweatshop-free, the company modified its publicity to make the claim without attribution. Guess also attached tags to Christmas-season apparel which claimed 'This is a no-sweat garment'.

In response, UNITE has stepped up its public-relations campaign against Guess. The union has sponsored newspaper ads signed by hundreds of political, labour, human-rights and religious leaders in the US. The ads call for justice at Guess and an end to sweatshops. Former sewers like Cruz stand outside some of the 1,345 US stores that sell the company's jeans and other clothing, asking shoppers to boycott Guess. They carry signs that say 'Shame on Guess', and 'There are no holidays in a sweatshop'.

Cruz hopes the company will eventually listen to stories like hers. 'I wish that, instead of moving production to Mexico, Guess would begin to work with companies that have unions so the workers are paid a better wage. We shouldn't have to work 10 or 12 hours a day to earn 40 or 50 dollars.' ■

Sarah Cox is a freelance journalist based in Victoria, BC, who writes about globalization.

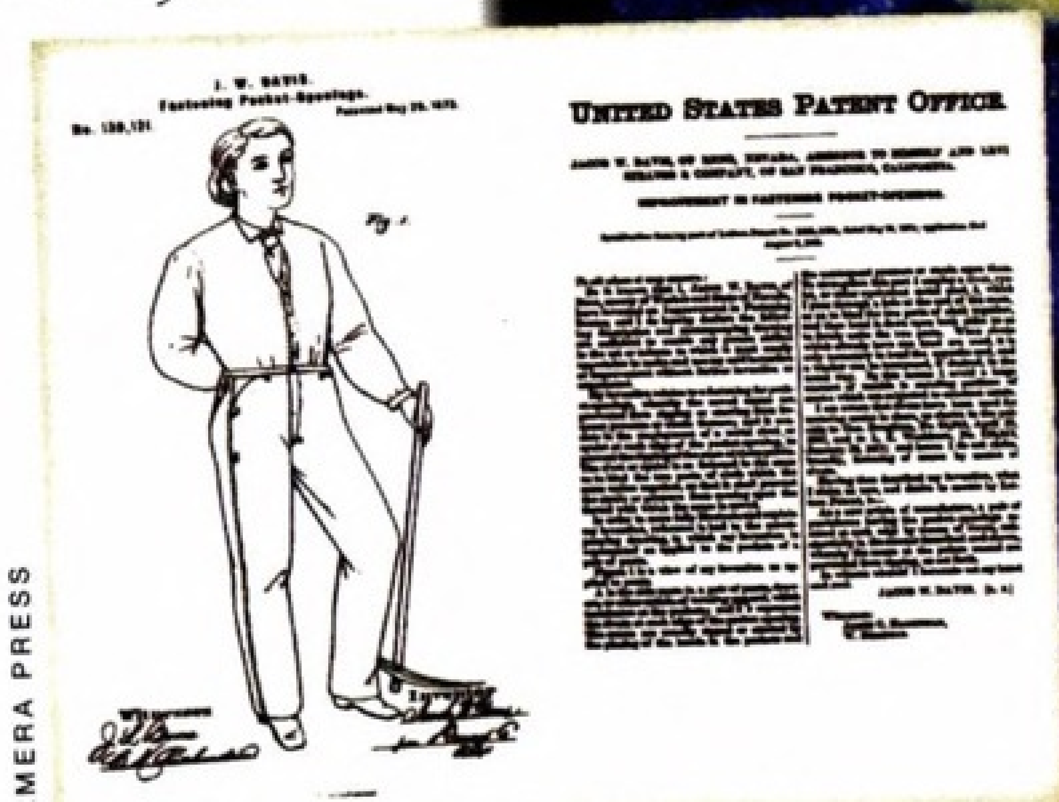
The blue jeans story

Or how 'waist overalls' for gold diggers, gun slingers and rebels without a cause got smart, clothed the American Dream and conquered the world.

CAMERA PRESS

Denim

'Denim' is probably a corruption of the French **serge de Nîmes**, a twill-weave fabric made in Nîmes during the 17th century. Another European fabric – a 'fustian' made from a cotton, linen and/or wool blend – was known as 'jean' after the sailors of Genoa, Italy, who wore it. By the 18th century, as slave labour, trade and cotton plantations developed, jean cloth was being made entirely of cotton and was valued for its durability. Indigo blue, extracted from plants in the Americas and India, became a familiar colour for workwear.



J. W. DAVIS.
Fastening Pocket-Openings.

No. 139,121.

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

CAMERA PRESS

Settlers

Immigrant weavers from Yorkshire, England, produced heavy cotton fustians – cotton-twill jeans – from a cloth mill in Massachusetts as early as 1638. In 1789 George Washington toured a mill in Massachusetts that was weaving both denim and jean. By 1849 a New York manufacturer was advertising topcoats, vests and short jackets in blue jean. Mechanics and painters were wearing overalls made of blue denim; others wore more tailored trousers made of jean.

Gold

Early in 1848 James Wilson Marshall, a carpenter from New Jersey, picked up nuggets of gold from the site of a sawmill he was building by a river near Coloma, California. By August the Gold Rush had begun. In 1853 Loeb Strauss (who later changed his name to Levi) arrived in San Francisco from New York and set up a wholesale business. Demand from miners for hard-wearing work clothes was strong. The **Pacific Rural Press** of 28 June 1873 observed: 'Nothing looks more slouchy in a workman than to see his pockets ripped open and hanging down, and no other part of the clothing is so apt to be torn and ripped as the pockets.'

Rivets

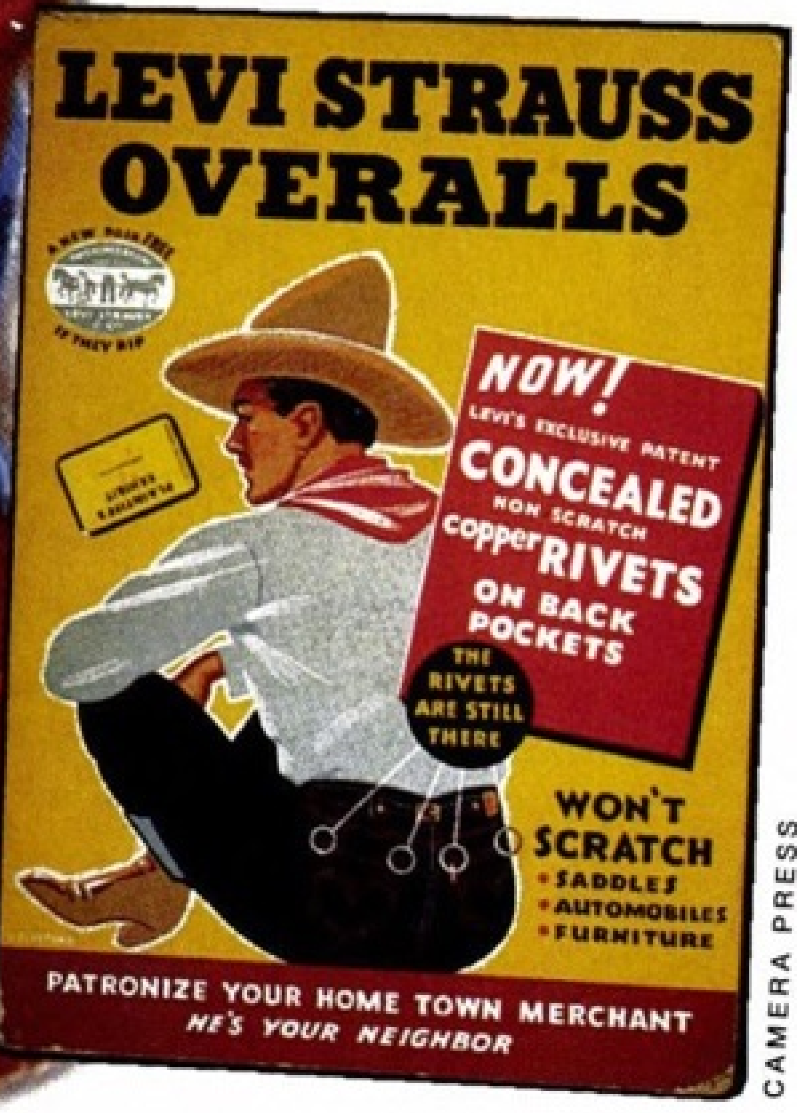
In 1872 Levi Strauss received a letter from Jacob Davis, who had been making riveted clothing for miners in the Reno area. Davis had no money to file for a patent and offered Levi Strauss a deal if he would pay for the patent. Levi Strauss began to make copper-riveted 'waist overalls' (as jeans were then known). In 1886 Levi's 'Two Horse Brand' leather patch, showing the garment pulled between two horses to prove its strength, was first used. By 1890 lot-numbers were being used for Levi products: 501 was assigned to copper-riveted overalls. In 1902 two back pockets were added.

MAGNUM

Top left: Californian miners wearing jeans in 1882; Centre from top right clockwise: an early denim mill in the US; Marilyn Monroe, the Woodstock festival; an early ad for jeans in Chinese; the image of jeans in the 1930s; John Wayne: the cowboy connection; the original patent for rivets; bottom right: denim for sale in London.

Movies

During the 1930s Western movies from Hollywood elevated 'authentic' cowboys, who were often portrayed wearing the garment, to mythic status. Easterners headed west for experience on dude ranches, and brought denim 'waist overalls' back east with them. Customer complaints led to the restitching of the Levi back pockets in 1937 so that the rivets were covered and did not scratch furniture or saddles. Suspender buttons were removed, though all customers were still supplied with a snap-on set.

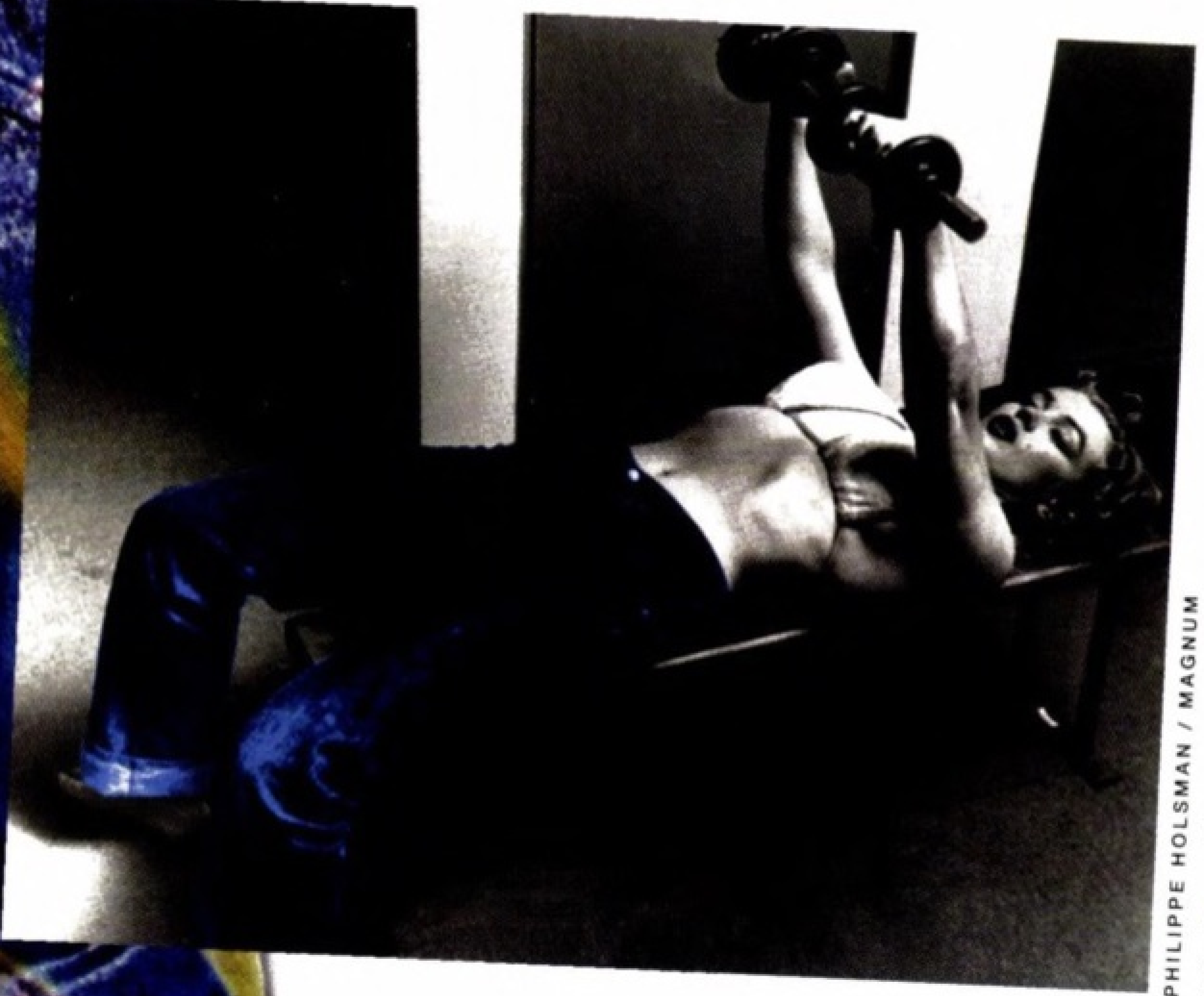


CAMERA PRESS

CAMERA PRESS

War

Restrictions on the use of raw materials during World War Two led to a decline in the production of 'waist overalls'. The crotch rivet and back cinch were removed to save fabric and metal. As GIs fanned out around the world the 'waist overalls' they sometimes wore while off duty carried American style and abundance to countries devastated by war. Denim became less associated with work than leisure. In 1947 Wrangler introduced the first 'body fit' jeans. In 1948 an old pair of jeans was found in an abandoned silver mine in the Mojave Desert, California. The woman who found them patched them up and wore them for a while. Then she wrote to Levi Strauss, who bought them for $25 and a few new pairs. Made around 1890, they are said to be the oldest pair of blue jeans in the world.



PHILIPPE HOLSMAN / MAGNUM

Rebels

After the war Levi Strauss began selling its products outside the American West for the first time. New rivals, such as Wrangler and Lee, began to compete for market share. Denim-clad 'juvenile delinquents' and 'motorcycle boys' featured in films and on TV; James Dean wore denim in the film **Rebel Without a Cause**. Some school administrators in the US banned denim altogether. In 1958 a syndicated newspaper report claimed that 'about 90 per cent of American youths wear jeans everywhere except in bed and in church'. Teenagers used the term 'jean pants', and the name stuck. The bad reputation – and the healthy sales – of jeans grew still further when 'college kids' wore them during the protests of the 1960s and at the Woodstock music festival in 1969.

Art

In 1964 a pair of Levi jeans entered the permanent collections of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC. In 1969 **American Fabrics** claimed: 'What has happened to denim in the last decade is really a capsule of what happened to America. It has climbed the ladder of taste.' Embroidered, painted, sequinned and 'psychedelic' denim took an outing on city streets. US jean manufacturers claimed that they regularly received begging letters from 'behind the Iron Curtain' and as far afield as Pitcairn Island. Jeans became a symbol of 'Western' culture – or 'decadence' – and a weapon in the Cold War.

CAMERA PRESS

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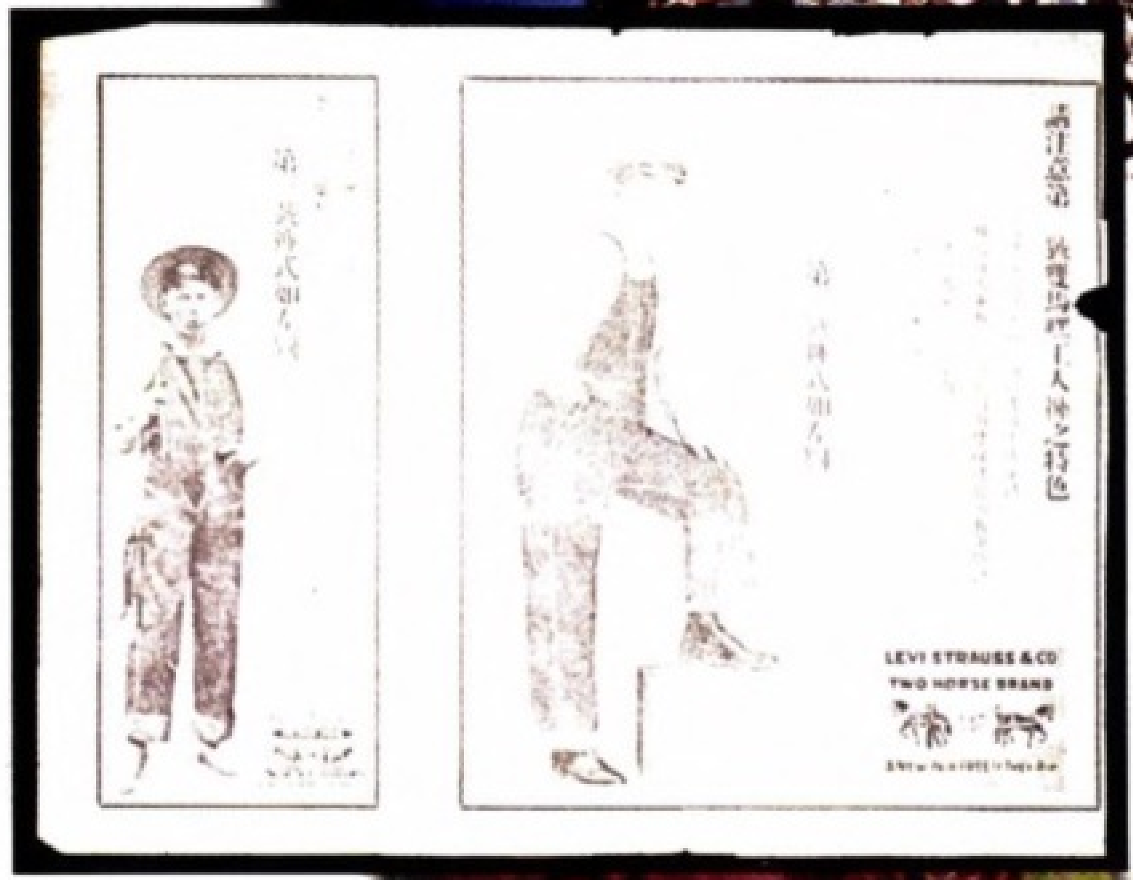
Label

With the liberalization of world trade from the late 1970s onwards 'sweatshops' using cheap – usually female – labour in the South began to replace factories in the North. Jeans appeared on city streets – even on miners and rural labourers – in the South. In the North, the 1980s 'designer jeans' craze took the garment firmly up-market. Booming sales of branded 'sports shoes', often worn with jeans, reinforced the trend. Chain stores and fashion houses promoted their own lines of jeans. A vast number of new 'labels' appeared. Established brands often missed the latest fad, like baggy jeans, and went for nostalgia instead. Sales rocketed. But during the worldwide recession of the early 1990s the empire of jeans stopped expanding as its subjects became restless.



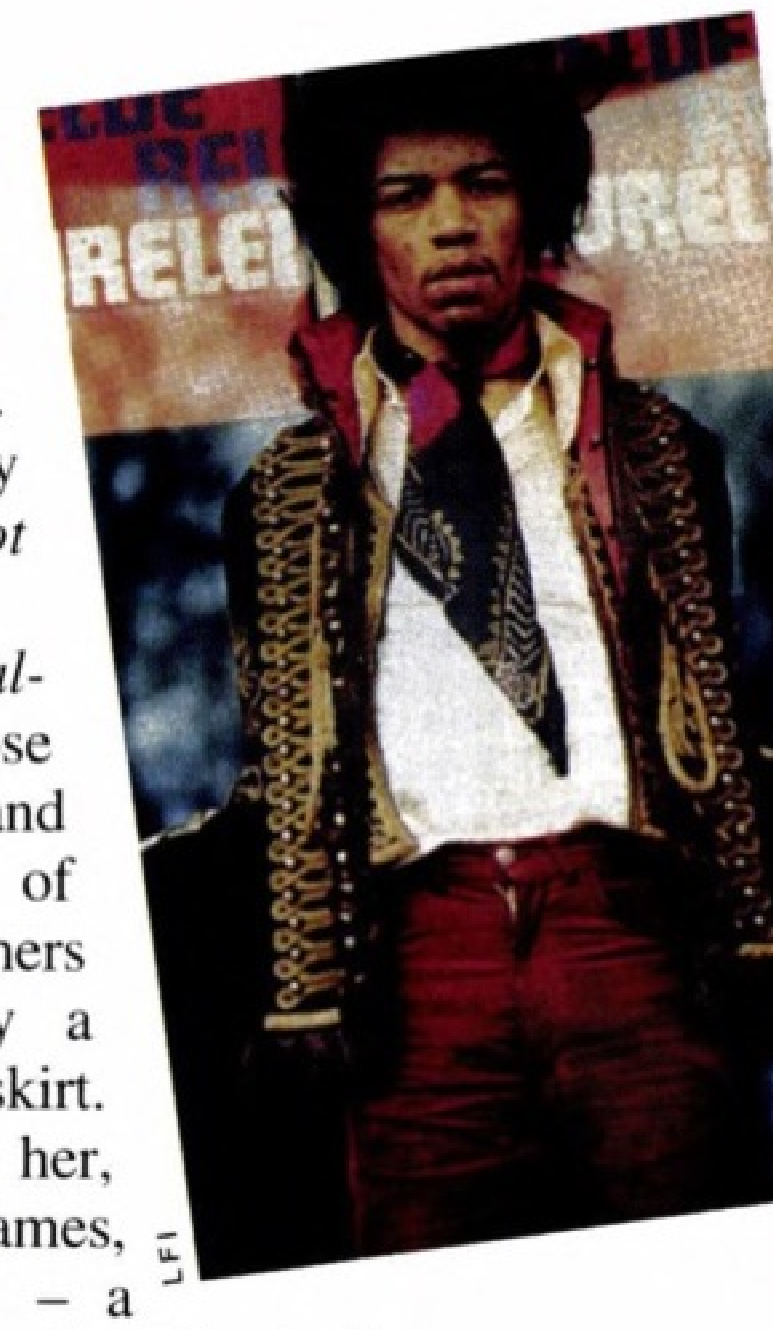
CAMERA PRESS

NIGEL DICKINSON / STILL PICTURES

Sources: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; Andrew Ross (ed), *No Sweat*, Verso, London, 1997; Lynn Downey, *A History of Denim*.

Jimi Hendrix, Man Friday and

If it's true that you are what you wear then **Urvashi Butalia** would rather expand into Indian clothes than contract into denim.


LFI

Maybe not made in America, but no match for *salvar kameez* on the streets of Bangalore.

I HAVE had a long and troubled relationship with jeans. I can't quite understand why this should be so. They don't really enter my life. But they don't *not* enter it either.

In my youth I wore *salvar kameez* – the loose north-Indian 'trousers' and long skirt – as did many of my contemporaries. Others wore *saris*. Occasionally a brave woman wore a skirt. And how we laughed at her, calling her all kinds of names, such as 'Chutney Mary' – a derogatory term used to describe Indian Christians. Of course I would never dream of doing this today.

Through school and college we knew of jeans, but they were clothes that people somewhere 'out there' wore. We scoffed a bit at the men in the university, for they'd so easily given in to wearing 'Western' clothes, while we women wore Indian clothes. There was the occasional foray into 'bell bottoms' and stiletto heels, but that we thought excusable. No jeans though. Perhaps this was because we felt proudly Indian, or because there was no television, or because we simply did not have access to 'imported' things – India was fiercely self-reliant about everything at the time.

So my first 'serious' foray into jeans came – horror of horrors – as late as the age of 24 or 25, when I spent some time in England. At first I wore *salvar kameez* and the occasional pair of trousers. Everyone else wore jeans. I wanted to be anonymous, so I went out and bought a pair. They did little for my black hair and dark skin, but at least from the waist downwards I looked like everyone else. I began to understand that with jeans you joined a club whose members were making some sort of statement about egalitarianism – although, of course, they weren't equal at all.

> *I suppose that in wearing jeans there was an element of not wanting to be like everyone else – except that in this way everyone ends up wearing jeans*

I suppose our Indian equivalent would be wearing *khadi*, the homespun cloth popularized by Gandhi. When they were fighting against the British, our parents and their contemporaries forswore foreign cloth. They only wore *khadi*. In a sort of leftover from that time, I wear only – or at least largely – handlooms, cottons, no synthetics and no 'foreign' clothes.

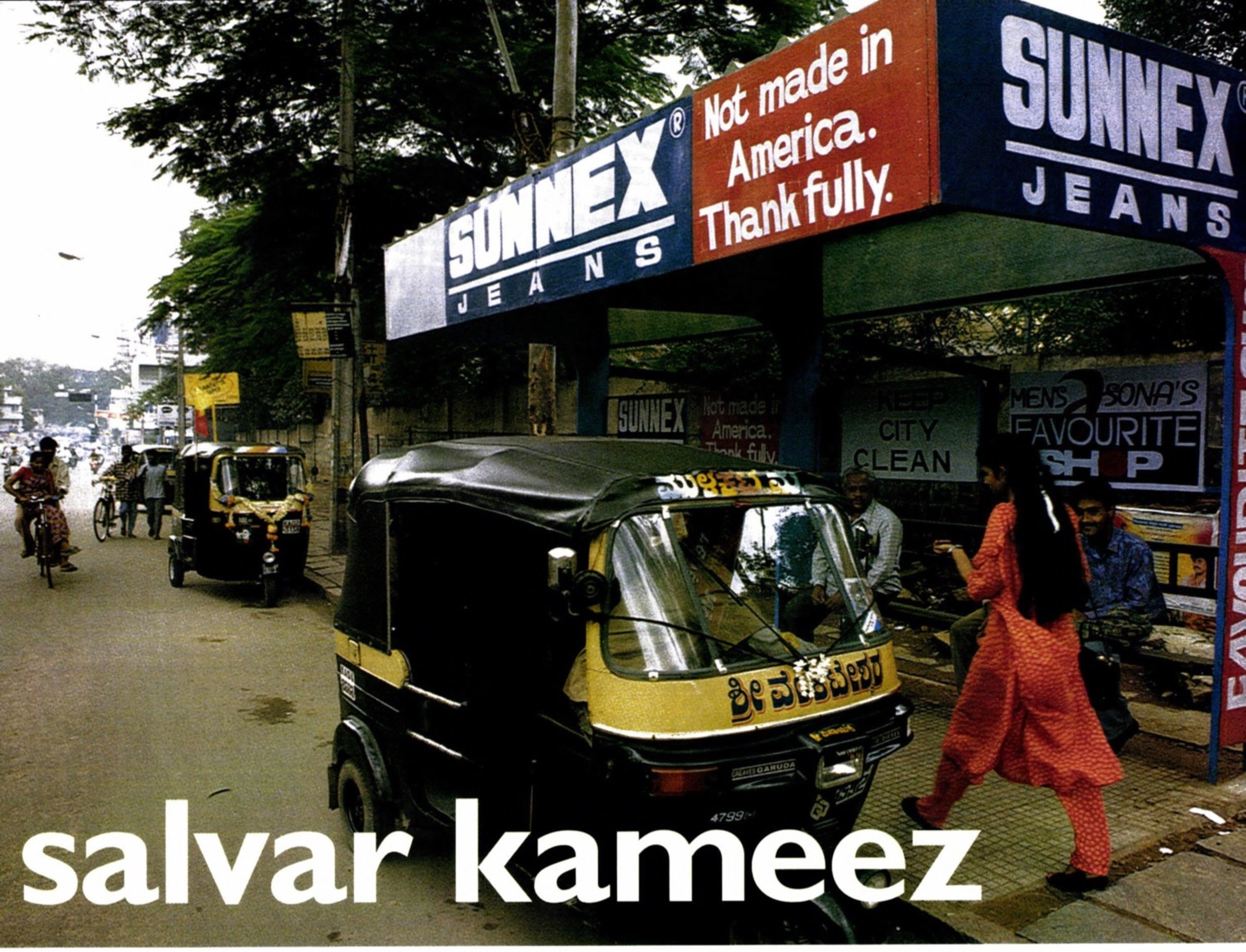
But some 20-or-so years ago, when I began teaching at the university, I was required – as were most women teachers – to wear *saris*. I was determined not to. I made my own private rebellion by wearing *salvar kameez*, and made of homespun cloth at that. Initially, the head of my department was horrified. They were not dignified, he said. But then he gave in, and today every teacher in the institution wears *salvar kameez*. Not wanting to be like everyone else, I thought I'd take the rebellion further. So I wore jeans. I suppose that in wearing them there was an element of not wanting to be like everyone else – except that in this way everyone ends up wearing jeans.

Many of my Indian friends tell me that they've now stopped doing so. One of them says it's because 'my stomach hangs down to my knees'. Although she believes they do make jeans for structurally-defective people, she hasn't a clue where to find them. The local shops stock jeans only for skateboard-hard-stomached people. Another says she's never worn jeans because 'they're simply not made for *Bharat Natyam* hips, and that's what we have'. *Bharat Natyam* alludes to the classical dance form, usually practised by well-endowed, broad, big-hipped women.

One of the things that held me back from wearing jeans – when I got to know about them that is – was the fact that, try as I might, I could not achieve a flat stomach. And I could not stand for the discomfort of constantly having to hold myself in, pretending there wasn't a mass there when there was. And then, living in India, you can wear jeans for only four months of the year – the rest of the time they're just too hot and uncomfortable.

But it's clear that jeans mean a great deal to many people. A friend of mine, a writer of stories and plays, recounts how she inherited a pink pair from a friend. They were filthy and worn, but she refused to wash them. Then one day, when she was out of the house, her sister put them in for a wash. Out they came, clean and sparkling. Manjula, my friend, has never forgiven her sister because, she says, they were supposed to have been worn by *Jimi Hendrix*!

A doctor friend of mine – a gynaecologist – once commented on how strange she found it that many of her women patients had rashes in their crotches because of the tight jeans they wore; and how, after being examined, they had to lie on the bed so that their stomachs could flatten out enough for them to get back into them.


SUNNEX JEANS
Not made in America. Thank fully.
SUNNEX JEANS
KEEP CITY CLEAN
MEN'S SONA'S FAVOURITE SHOP

salvar kameez

CHRIS STOWERS / PANOS

I've got nothing against jeans. If people like them, why shouldn't they wear them? Just because I can't get into them anymore, that doesn't mean I should get holier-than-thou about those who can. I think bodies take the shape of the clothes their owners wear. Indian clothes, especially for women – at least the kind I wear – are so comfortable. They're loose and sometimes even elegant. They hide a multiplicity of evils. I wear them all the time. Why stuff one's body into a tight garment made of a thick material that in all likelihood is in just one shade of blue?

Once you've got used to wearing loose-flowing clothes it's quite difficult, mentally and physically, to gear yourself up to wear jeans. A colleague of mine here in Delhi says she dare not let herself stop wearing them because then she'd just let herself go – and there'd be no controlling the space the body would take up. This way, she says, it stays contained, she walks straight, and at least there's an illusion of a not-so-big stomach.

But, of course, there are jeans and there are jeans. The young man who works in our office hails from a small village in north India. He's our general Man Friday. He studied only up to class ten, and although he can address envelopes he mostly makes the coffee and runs errands. Every time I go out of India I ask him if he'd like anything from 'outside' and he asks for 'jean-pant'. I keep trying to tell him he can get them in shops here; that mostly now they're made here anyway. But no. He wants them from outside.

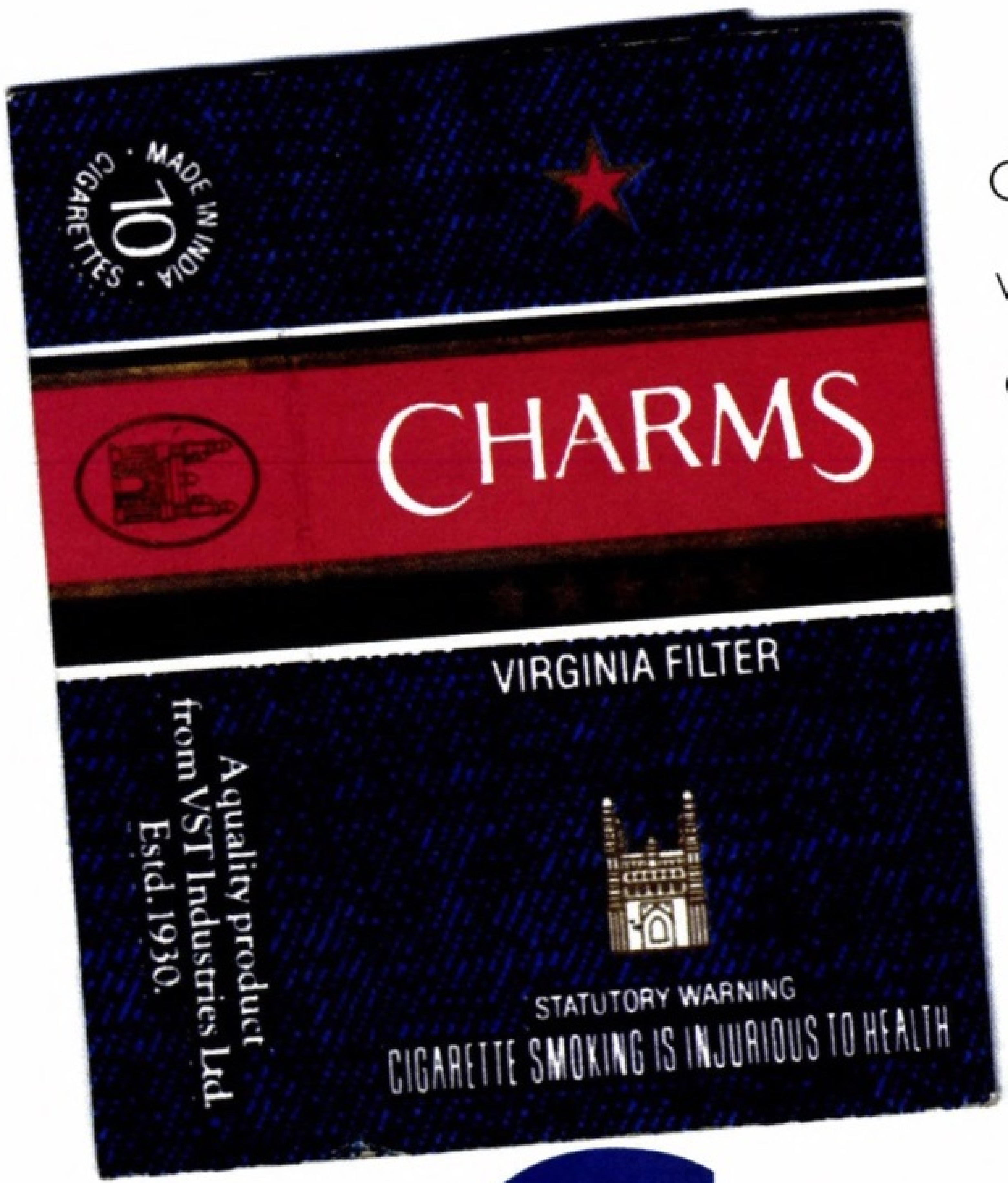
Some of my reluctance about jeans is, I think, because in our part of the world they have yet to become workaday clothes. Just as in the West they may have been symbols of 'downclassing', here they're quite the opposite. They're a sign of upward movement, or aspiration, and therefore objects of desire. They're only sold in fancy, posh, boutique-type shops. Our Man Friday would never dream of stepping into one of these. How could he? He's a 'country bumpkin'. They'd be nasty to him. The smart and fashionable lot who buy jeans would laugh at him. So he asks us to get them for him from outside. This way he can avoid those fancy shops *and* get a pair of 'imported' jeans to boot.

And, in the end, that's why I won't wear jeans. It may well be that I no longer have the right shape for them. But, more than that, I can't think of them simply as jeans. They're symbols of the West. They're meant to 'declass' you, yet they're advertised as 'mean' – something that gives you some kind of power once you step into them. I tell myself that hundreds, millions of people have lived without jeans all their lives. All over India people still find the most comfortable form of dress is some sort of light fabric draped over their bodies – whether it's the *dhoti*, the *lungi* or the *sari*. If they have to wear sewn clothes then there's the *salvar kameez*, the *lehanga* (a long skirt) and many more.

Small comfort. For with television the day cannot be far off when jeans will enter the nooks and crannies of this country, and everyone will suffer together in the heat, feeling they're being very smart. Just as the local sweeper, who cleans the roads near our house, does every summer now that he's taken to wearing blue jeans.

Years ago, Indian workers protested against the exploitative policies of British indigo planters – yes, in a way it all started here, with indigo. We're good at claiming such histories. Little did we know that indigo would come home to roost in the shape of blue jeans. ■

Urvashi Butalia is a writer and editor. She works in Delhi with Kali for Women, India's first feminist publishing house, which she co-founded in 1994.


MADE IN INDIA · 10 CIGARETTES ·
CHARMS
VIRGINIA FILTER
A quality product from VST Industries Ltd. Estd. 1930.
STATUTORY WARNING
CIGARETTE SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

Crazy for blue

Outside the US, the world's largest maker of denim is in India. **Krishnamohan S Rao** reports on a surprising development of do-it-yourself jean kits.

TEN years ago I decided to smoke Charms cigarettes – not for their superior flavour, but because the carton matched my first pair of jeans. Those of us in India who had seen them only on TV and Western movies had gone absolutely crazy for them. Barely into my teens and eager to charm the girls, I walked the streets of Bangalore in dirty jeans. A victim of MTV, I was under the illusion that women like men in soiled jeans, with cigarette butts sticking out of their mouths.

Meanwhile, one Indian textile company had spotted the trend. Established in 1931 in Ahmedabad, western India, Arvind Mills used to produce traditional cotton fabrics and garments for domestic consumption. But when, in the 1980s, low-cost powerlooms began flooding the market with cheap cotton fabrics, the company had to change in order to survive. Arvind reckoned denim was a fabric that would never go out of style. So it dismantled all its disorganized mills – which made nearly 250 different products, from *saris* to handkerchiefs – and concentrated on denim.

This was not a piece of cake – not for an unknown company in a Third World country. There was no local demand for denim. The only market was in the West, where a long-established bias against textiles from India still operates. Rich-world countries continue to use the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) to keep textiles from the Third World out of Western markets. At first Arvind tried to overcome this by hiding its Indian identity. Then it established subsidiaries in Mauritius and Germany. Eventually its high-quality denim, made from low-cost local cotton, began selling well in more and more countries.

On the back of denim, Arvind is now one of a new breed of 'Third World Transnational Corporations'; the third-largest manufacturer of denim in the world and the largest outside the US. It exports over 150 varieties to 66 countries and is used by many big brand names including Lee, Wrangler, Lee Cooper, Gap, Marks & Spencer, JC Penny and C&A.

The group employs around 20,000 people on relatively good wages and behaves like a decent employer with a sense of social responsibility. It has set up a training centre to improve the skills of its workers, and a rural-development fund to assist the residents of nearby villages. In 1995 it was, it claims, the first denim company in the world to receive 'Eco-tex' certification from the European Community for its eco-friendly textiles.

The rise of the Indian middle class after economic liberalization in the early 1990s gave Arvind a chance to market its denim locally. Satellite TV boomed in India during the Gulf War and increased demand for products associated with the West – especially jeans. Arvind cashed in and introduced its own brand. For the 'economy' sector it made Newport, priced at about $10 and sold throughout the country under the slogan 'Good Jeans for Less'. It went on to become one of the most popular Indian brands. Following this success, Arvind launched denim shirts, T-shirts and even briefs. It ventured into non- traditional areas like Indian outfits, corporate-gift articles, stationery, upholstery and briefcases. Other Indian companies, like KG Mills and Modern Mills, soon followed suit.

For the rural market – where people still find that tailored garments last longer than ready-made – Arvind introduced Ruf & Tuf, a ready-to-stitch jeans kit. The kit consists of pant-length denim, a pouch of rivets, a leather label and an instruction booklet in the regional language of the tailor.

I suppose all this makes me pleased – for a moment. But the implications are worrying. I see jeans everywhere. Will they destroy the traditional cotton garments of India, just as they destroyed the ponchos and pyjamas of Mexico? I remember a friend complaining about the heat while wearing embroidered denim. But, thanks to those convincing advertisements, people will doubtless keep wearing the things – a superficial symbol of an essentially American dream. ■

Krishnamohan S Rao is a freelance journalist currently based in Scotland.

The **NI** Interview

Ratan Gazmere

Howard Davies visits Nepal where he meets an exiled human-rights activist from neighbouring Bhutan.

RATAN GAZMERE has a gentle manner which masks the harshness of his experiences at the hand of Bhutanese authorities.

Bhutan is a small country of barely 700,000 people nestled in the eastern Himalayas. The Buddhist nation is sandwiched between China, India and Nepal and has been ruled since 1972 by the hereditary monarch King Jigme Singye Wangchuk. There is no written constitution or bill of rights and opposition parties are banned. Politically and economically Bhutan lives under the shadow of its vast neighbour India, which has a strong influence over all aspects of life including defence and foreign policy.

Most of the country's civil servants and teachers are Hindus of Indian origin. However, the majority of Bhutanese are Buddhists who survive as subsistence farmers and herders.

In 1989 the Government stepped up its 'Bhutanization' campaign, requiring all citizens to wear the national dress on official occasions. The Government also banned the Bhutan Peoples Party, which had been set up to represent the interests of the Nepalese minority – known in Bhutan as the *Lhotsampa.* Ethnic Nepalese make up nearly half the country's population.

Ratan recalls the effects of the changes. 'Simple farmers suddenly had to wear the national dress. One man was fined for not wearing the clothing while ploughing his fields.'

According to Ratan the new laws were part of a 'one nation, one people' policy to consolidate power in the hands of the *Ngalongpas,* the ethnic group of the royal family who total around 15 per cent of the population.

Ratan says the ethnic makeup of Bhutan only became an issue in the late 1980s when the King decided to make it one.

Shortly after the 'Bhutanization' laws came into effect Ratan joined with some colleagues to produce an underground pamphlet questioning the divisive policies of the Government. 'We had to publish secretly because we knew they wouldn't accept open opposition.'

Then in October 1989 the police searched Ratan's home and discovered a letter to King Jigme from the leading opposition politician Tek Nath Rizal. He was immediately arrested. 'That was all the evidence they needed to take me into custody. I was held for 26 months.'

Ratan was driven to the police station in the capital, Thimpu. 'The first night I was tortured. They bound my arms, then placed lengths of wood on either side of my upper legs. A policeman stood on the ends of the wood to crush them. The pain was excruciating. Then they beat the backs of my knees and the soles of my feet.'

On several occasions during the three months he spent at the police station Ratan tried to get his wife, Gauri Giri, to pass on word of his arrest to Amnesty International. Gauri, pregnant with their first child, would bring him food in a 'tiffin box'.

'Once I scratched a message with my thumbnail on a piece of cigarette foil and stuck this to the bottom of the tiffin box,' Ratan recalls. Nine years later he and Gauri describe the incident quickly, laughing and overlapping one another as they remember their daring. But beneath the laughter, the memory of fear remains.

Ratan was later locked in solitary confinement in Rabuna, a notorious military prison. The memories are painful and difficult. He was restrained by leg irons or handcuffs for much of his imprisonment. 'I was placed in a small, dimly lit cell. A blacksmith came and shackled my ankles. At night they handcuffed me to the bed. They tortured me only on the first night, but all the time I spent in prison was a kind of torture.'

Eventually Gauri discovered that Ratan was being held in Rabuna. She went with a friend and brashly demanded to see him. Prison authorities simply shrugged their shoulders and denied any knowledge of her husband. She didn't see him again until 1991 by which time her son was nearly one year old.

Ratan's case was eventually taken up by Amnesty International and conditions began to improve in the prison. He was released in December 1991, shortly before an Amnesty delegation arrived in Bhutan.

The Government's persecution of the Nepalese minority increased during Ratan's imprisonment and tens of thousands fled their homes. Soon more than 100,000 Lhotsampa had streamed into UN refugee camps across the border in Nepal.

Meanwhile, human-rights advocacy work in Bhutan became impossible. Finally, Ratan and his family joined the exiles in July 1992. 'It was a hard decision but we could do nothing in Bhutan with the constant harassment and threat of re-arrest. Now I can campaign for human rights and for the repatriation of the refugees.'

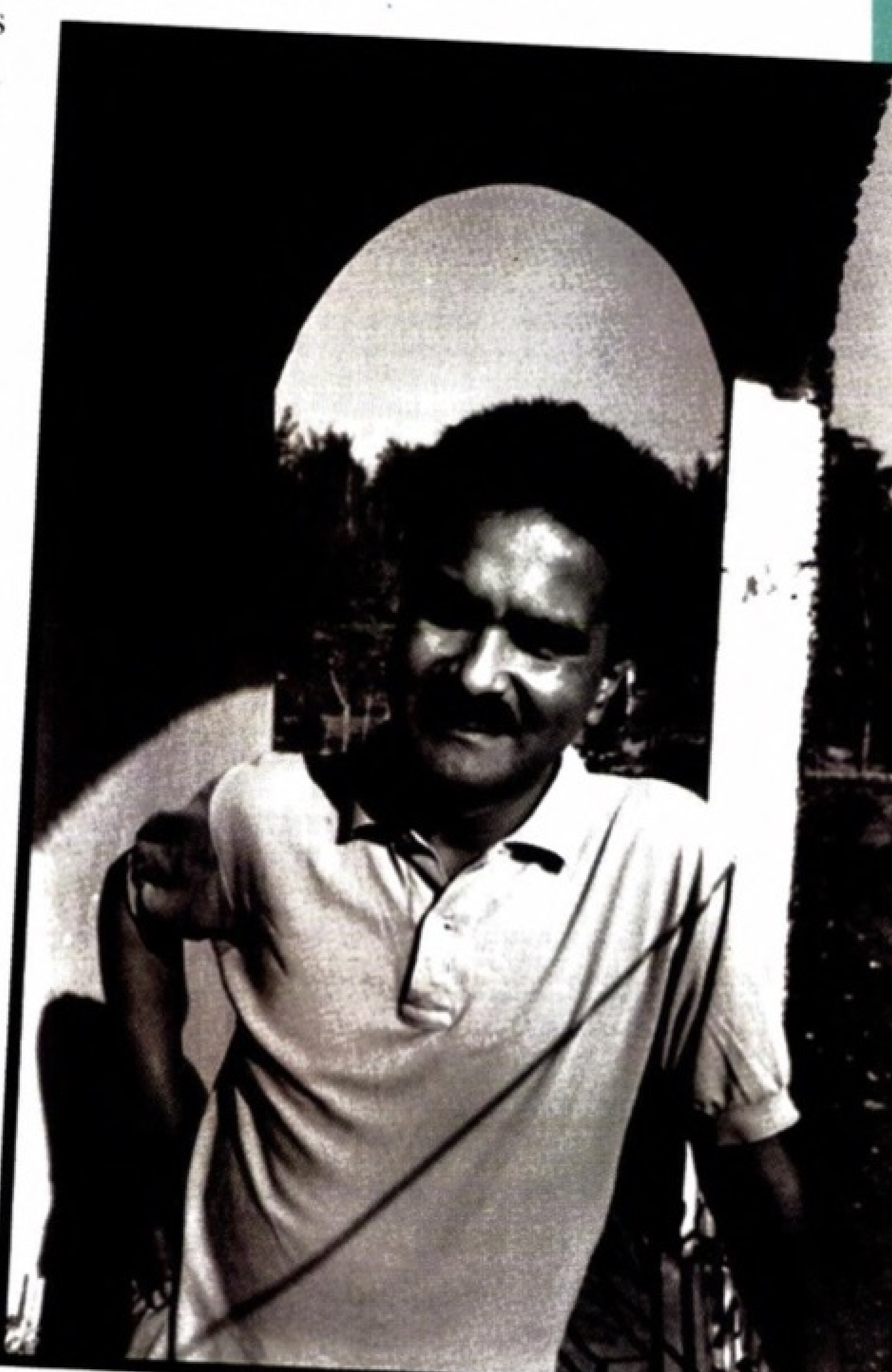
A visit by Britain's Prince Charles briefly focused the media's attention on Bhutan. The Government refused entry to many of the journalists who wanted to accompany the Prince. So Ratan brought the excluded journalists, keen for a story, to see the refugee camps.

He is also campaigning for the release of political prisoners including Tek Nath Rizal, the outspoken opposition leader and democracy campaigner. Tek Nath was abducted illegally from his exile in Nepal and turned over to the Government of King Jigme.

Despite condemnation by the European Parliament and Amnesty International, repression continues. The Government has targetted the *Sarchop* ethnic group in the east of the country, arresting Buddhist monks and teachers. And recently more than 200 Bhutanese civil servants with family members in the refugee camps were fired as suspected 'security risks'.

Nonetheless, the fight for a democratic constitution and legalization of political parties continues. Ratan remains optimistic. 'In the long term,' he says confidently, 'you can't crush popular discontent with repressive measures.' ■

Howard Davies is a UK photographer and refugee activist.



HOWARD DAVIES

For further information contact the Bhutanese Refugee Support Group.
e-mail: bhutanrefugee@usa.net
Website: www.users.globalnet.co.uk/kruss/bhutan

Reviews

music

Dumbala Dumba

by **Taraf de Haïdouks**
(Crammed Discs CRAW 21 CD)

Ocean Songs

by **Dirty Three** *(Bella Union BELLA 3)*

Soon after Ceaucescu was deposed as Romanian dictator, two Belgians travelling in the country chanced upon a group of a dozen or so gypsy musicians in their village of Clejani, southwest of Bucharest. They were Taraf de Haïdouks and nothing really prepares one for the first encounter with their gypsy soul music. There is, in their traditional tunes and songs, a wildness and a spirit that makes party tunes boisterous or laments solemn and plangent. There's little point in making any comparisons with the jaunty violin melodies that are periodically offered up as authentic gypsy material.

Since the Belgian-based label introduced the band to audiences outside Romania, Taraf de Haïdouks have bowled over countless assemblies. **Dumbala Dumba** is their third album. That it exists at all is extraordinary: Romania has long had an ambivalent relationship with its gypsies and during the Ceaucescu regime folk music was corralled in the service of the state and a culture of 'fakelore' grew up. Not surprisingly, these 'fakelore' songs no longer exist; for traditional music to survive, it has to be grafted to a living root.

Taraf de Haïdouks' fast vivacious music spans cultures – Balkan, Slavic and Turkish – with a rhythm of tradition and everyday ritual. Invigorated by the addition of guests, such as a group of Ursar former bear-tamers, the exciting beat, claps and rhythms speak for themselves. The shifts and the cadences reach back to the music's Middle Eastern origins and often the music can seem quite rough and uneven, but it quickly asserts its ability to regenerate itself with a flourish. And using makeshift instruments such as barrels, spoons and chairs, these dozen or so musicians suggest an urgent need to make music. It's a powerful and affirming communication.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

In their wild, soaring, creaking melodies, it might be said that Dirty Three possess a bit of Taraf de Haïdouks' spirit, even soul. If this seems preposterous, check out the trio's fourth album, **Ocean Songs**. Led by violinist Warren Ellis (who also plays with Nick Cave's Bad Seeds), the band specializes in an instrumental sound that can range from manic heights to slow, understated melodies. Ellis, a trained player who left his native Melbourne to study with the gypsies in Romania and Morocco, brings a full range of improvisatory talents to fruition in the band. Guitarist Mick Turner and drummer Jim White provide a launchpad for Ellis's playing, and on **Ocean Songs** he coaxes a strange and mournful blues into being. As seductive a record as you will ever find.

Politics ☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ LG

BRAD MILLER

books

Hidden Agendas

by John Pilger
(Vintage, ISBN 0099-41512)

Benedita da Silva
An Afro-Brazilian Woman's Story of Politics and Love

as told to **Medea Benjamin** and **Maisa Mendonça** *(Food First Books(US)/Latin America Bureau (UK) ISBN 0 935028 70 6/1899365214*

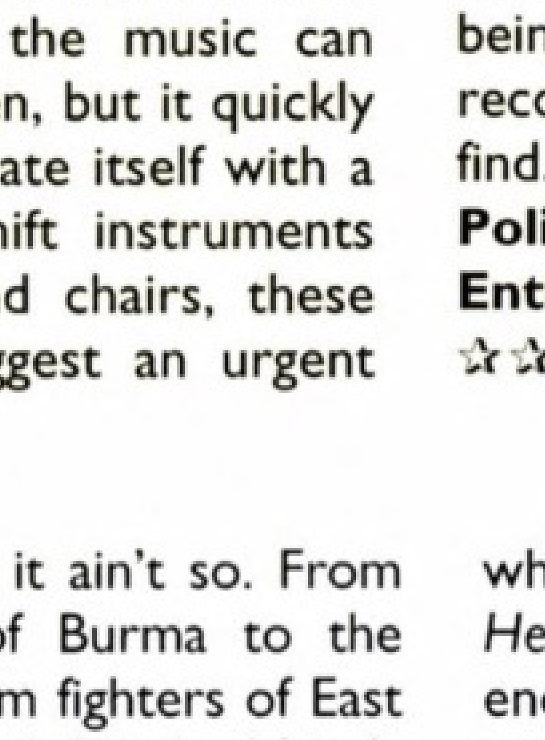
Viramma: life of an untouchable

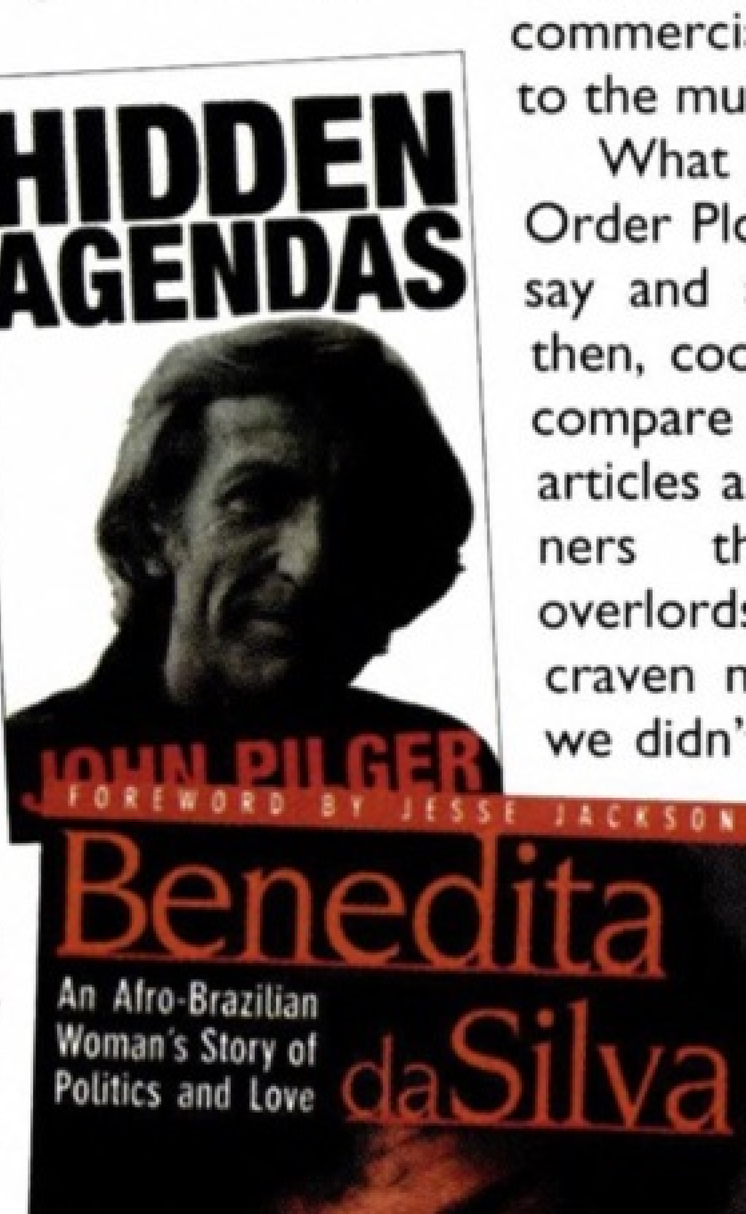
by **Viramma**, **Josiane Racine** and **Jean Luc Racine** *(Verso ISBN 1-85984-148-1)*

We are constantly informed by our bland, 'modernizing' leaders that all is for the best in our cosy, deregulated global market-place. Like a chorus of latter-day Dr Panglosses they tell us that a casualized, low-wage economy and crumbling, privatized infrastructure run for the profit of the few, are all that is on offer.

Well, like the boy in the crowd who saw what the Emperor's clothes were really made of, John Pilger is here to say it ain't so. From the democracy movement of Burma to the Liverpool dockers, the freedom fighters of East Timor to the shantytowns of South Africa's Eastern Cape, Pilger hears and reports the voices that are filtered out by consensual newsmaking. Names such as José Ramos-Horta and Bishop Bello, Aung San Suu Kyi and Mordechai Vanunu are rightly prominent, but they are not the only heroes here. Pilger's work celebrates and honours the resilience and courage of all those throughout the world whose solidarity and grassroots organization is, in Colin Ward's memorable phrase, 'the seed beneath the snow'. Ordinary people's determination to resist oppression and to 'speak the truth to power' is the dynamo that drives his passionate journalism.

There is a sense in which Pilger, as with that other great scourge of establishment mendacity, Noam Chomsky, is constantly re-writing and updating the same book. **Hidden Agendas** draws on its predecessor *Distant Voices* which was itself an extension of his 1986 book *Heroes*. Is this a criticism? Only if you are naive enough to believe that politicians have become paragons of virtue in the last dozen years and take them at their word when they claim an 'ethical' foreign policy yet say they cannot, for commercial reasons, stop the export of jets to the murderous Indonesian regime.




FOREWORD BY JESSE JACKSON
Benedita da Silva
An Afro-Brazilian Woman's Story of Politics and Love
As told to Medea Benjamin and Maisa Mendonça

What galls the directors of New World Order Plc is that Pilger listens to what they say and also watches what they do and then, cool as you like, has the audacity to compare and contrast the two. His books, articles and films shine a light into the corners that arms dealers, corporate overlords, hypocritical politicians and craven media propagandists would rather we didn't see. This is a wonderful, incisive book. Read it.

Politics ☆☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ PW

Someone who definitely qualifies as a 'seed beneath the snow' is the remarkable **Benedita da Silva**, or Bené as she is more affectionately known. The first black woman to be elected to Brazil's Senate – where 90 per cent of senators are white males – she was raised in a Rio *favela* and continues to live there.

A politician telling their own

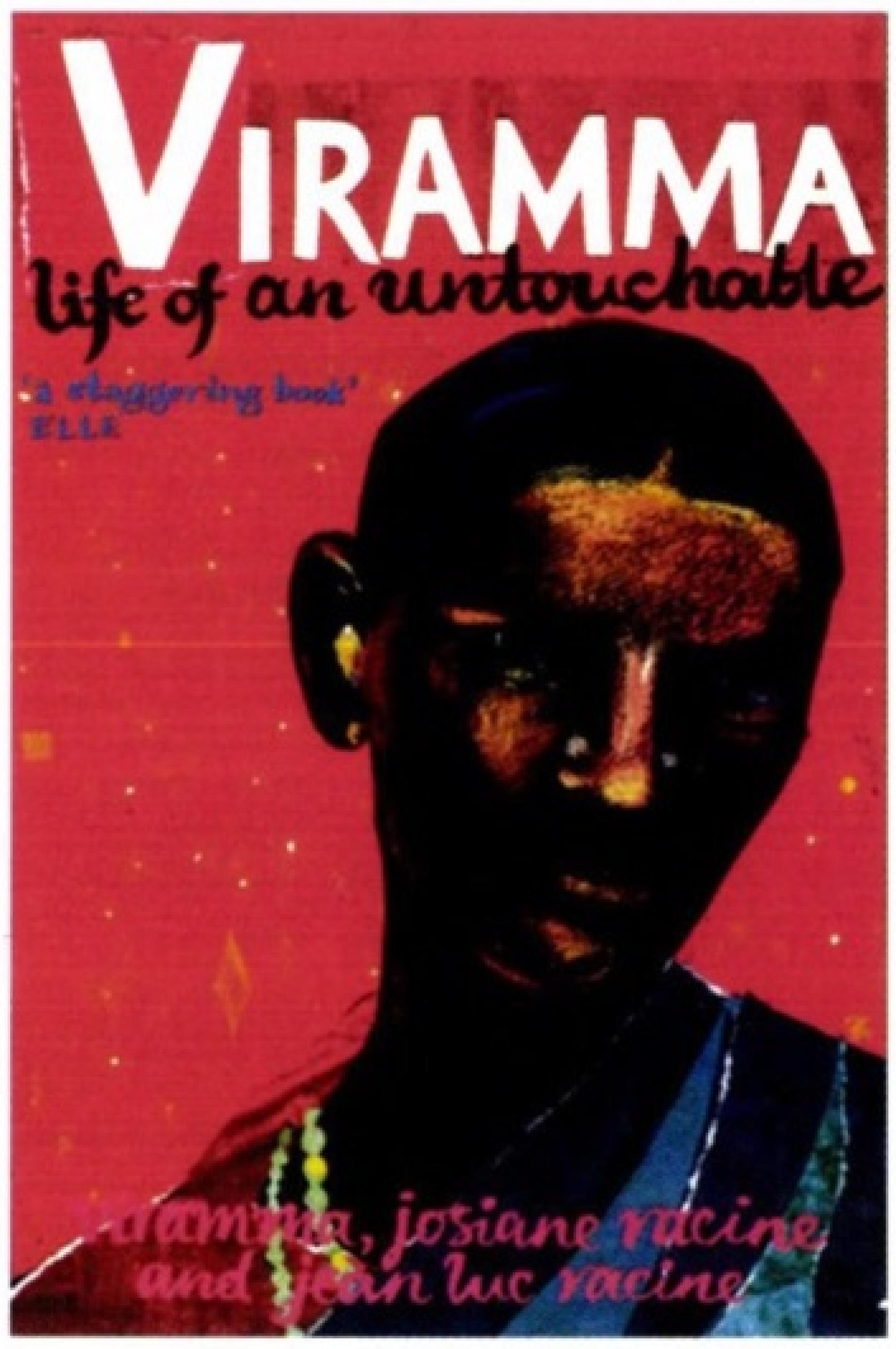
story runs the risk of sinking into self-promotion. But, thanks to her emotional candour, Benedita by and large avoids this. What comes across is her deep passion for social justice and total commitment to the community she comes from. She's a tremendous survivor, continuing to live while those she loves drop like flies around her, but she's vulnerable too and admits it.

As a story of political activism – Benedita is a feminist, campaigner for street-children and founder member of the Brazilian Worker's Party – her narrative is an inspiration.

Politics ☆☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆

The capacity to describe hardship with humour is a rare talent. But it's one that the protagonist of **Viramma: life of an untouchable** clearly has. This autobiography is the product of ten years' worth of conversation between Viramma, a 60-something illiterate *dalit*, and fellow, albeit middle-class, native Tamil-speaker Josiane Racine. What makes it exceptional is that Viramma is such a wonderfully earthy, witty story-teller. Her life is undoubtedly tough, and she does not gloss over the brutalities and hypocrisies of caste, class and gender repression in India. But she approaches life with such a robust, raunchy humour you can't help but smile. This book's a delight, buzzing with raw energy and authenticity.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ VB



STAR RATING

Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

Poems 1913-1956

...being both a diary of daily events and a commentary on world affairs.

THIS year sees the centenary of the birth of the German playwright and poet, Bertolt Brecht. For some academics and fellow-travellers of the right, such an anniversary, following on from the 'ending' of the Cold War, has signalled open season on Brecht. Shrill biographies have appeared in which wild accusations of misogyny and plagiarism are made.

These recent attacks have in common a strong ideological motivation; Brecht the unrepentant Marxist must be cut down to size now that global capitalism is the only game in town. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the toppling of the statues must be followed by the humbling of this socialist icon.

In this atmosphere of nouveau-McCarthyism, it is illuminating to look beyond the pseudo-debate over whether Brecht's well-known collaborative working methods amounted to theft and instead concentrate on the bedrock of his craft; the neglected and little-known poetry.

From his earliest days, poetry poured out of Brecht, jotted down on scraps of paper as he wandered the streets of his home town of Augsberg. Many of these early poems, such as the rumbustious *Ballad of the Pirates* or the deliberately schmaltzy *Remembering Maria A* were written with musical accompaniment and, indeed, many made their way as songs into his first play, *Baal*. The success of his second play *Drums in the Night* led to Brecht's move to Berlin where he wrote the poetic series *The Impact of the Cities*. Throughout the early 1930s, as the Nazis tightened their grip on power, poetry for Brecht became an increasingly polemical tool, a means of expressing his political opposition and rallying resistance. Often he was spurred to write by news items, as he explains in *Bad Time For Poetry*:

Inside me contend
Delight at the Apple tree in blossom
*And horror at the house painter's**
speeches
But only the second
Drives me to my desk.
[Hitler]*

When, in 1933, Brecht was forced into exile in Scandinavia and later the United States, poetry remained the constant thread in his life. At a time when his books were burned in Germany and he was seldom able to stage his plays, poetry was at once a diary of everyday events, a commentary on world affairs and a chance to test and expand ideas and theories. The poems of these exile years are astonishingly tautly written, often turning on a single telling image or detail. They are also the most compelling in terms of their humanity and empathy; the poet struggling to encompass in words the horrors of war sweeping across the continents:

The old see the young die
The foolish see the wise die
The earth no longer produces, it devours
The sky hurls down no rain, only iron

It is undeniable that these darkest days of war saw Brecht's best work as a poet. At the war's end he returned to a divided Germany, founding the Berliner Ensemble, the theatre company dedicated to performing his plays. In these last years Brecht was circumspect – to say the least – in his comments about the communist rulers of East Germany, torn between party loyalty and deep scepticism. Only after his death in 1957 did pieces critical of Stalin and the East German regime see the light of day, most famously the poem *The Solution*:

After the uprising of
the 17th June
The Secretary of the
Writer's Union
Had leaflets distributed
in the Stalinallee
Stating that the people
Had forfeited the confidence of the
government
And could win it back only
By redoubled efforts.
Would it not be easier
In that case for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?

Reading these works, it becomes clear how the theatrical and musical collaborations – with Weill, Eisler, Elizabeth Hauptmann and others – were built upon the superstructure of the poetic writing. As John Willet and Ralph Manheim say in the introduction to their definitive collection of his poetry, 'More painfully (and more powerfully) than in any of his stage works, he was writing the tragedy of our time.' ■

Peter Whittaker

Poems 1913-1956 by **Bertolt Brecht**, edited by John Willett & Ralph Manheim (Methuen, 1976) ISBN 0 413 487903.

Reviews

film

Shooting Indians

directed by **Ali Kazimi**
(Mongrel Media, Toronto, Canada)

'Here I'm called an East Indian,' says Ali Kazimi of his life in Canada. While growing up in India, Kazimi heard the classic myths of the American Red Man, the noble, authentic people who vanished. Once in Canada his desire to find the authentic led him to Native artist Jeff Thomas, a photographer of Iroquois descent, born in Buffalo, New York, now living in Canada.

Thomas's life is a fascinating journey from the grim neighbourhoods of East Buffalo to his work for the National Archives. As an artist he has worked to represent many facets of modern Native life. One set of his portraits shows the before-and-after transformation of pow-wow dancers as they change from their street clothes into traditional dress; even Thomas often doesn't recognize them afterwards. Another series shows historic statues of Indians – often at the feet of an explorer – with Thomas's son posed in front. It is an ironic mode: the mythic brave and the living inheritor of a complex tradition.

Ali Kazimi's film, **Shooting Indians**, centres on Thomas's struggle with the classic work of Edward Curtis, a white photographer who, during the years 1898 to 1928, created a remarkable record of Native peoples in North America. Curtis's reputation has seen many reversals. Today his work stands as a source and a foil; the images remain deeply disturbing to many Native viewers, in the way that they romanticize, implying that Native peoples, while noble, were doomed. In most of his portraits Curtis insisted that no evidence of white contact be visible. Native leaders posed at his studio or in wilderness landscapes in traditional dress only, no European objects or clothes allowed.

Thomas and Kazimi managed to find the lead actress, now 100 years old, who played a topless Indian princess in a film shot by Curtis on Vancouver Island in 1914 called *In the Land of the Head Hunters*. To her as well, the Curtis film was a mixed experience – a white man's vision but accurate enough to serve as a delightful home movie from a very different time.

Unfortunately there was no tradition of Indians photographing themselves, says Thomas, and this provides the starting point for his work. His challenge is to show modern Native people as dignified heirs to a rich tradition and as ordinary, unromanticized folks too. But the film is also biography, the portrait of a contemporary. Thomas struggles with marriage, fatherhood, and work. At one point, in the mid-1980s, the film nearly died because Thomas's personal life was in turmoil. In fact Thomas and Kazimi lost track of each other for years, brought together again by chance.

This is a quiet, subtle film, where both subject and filmmaker reveal their evolving ideas, both struggling to show respect for those they photograph, but without a mythic gloss. For Thomas it's a case of studying, not vilifying Curtis. For Kazimi 'what has vanished is my image of the mythic, imaginary Red Indian.'

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆ PS

Reviewers: **Louise Gray, Peter Whittaker, Vanessa Baird, Peter Steven**
Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

The NI Crossword

No. 22 by **Axe**

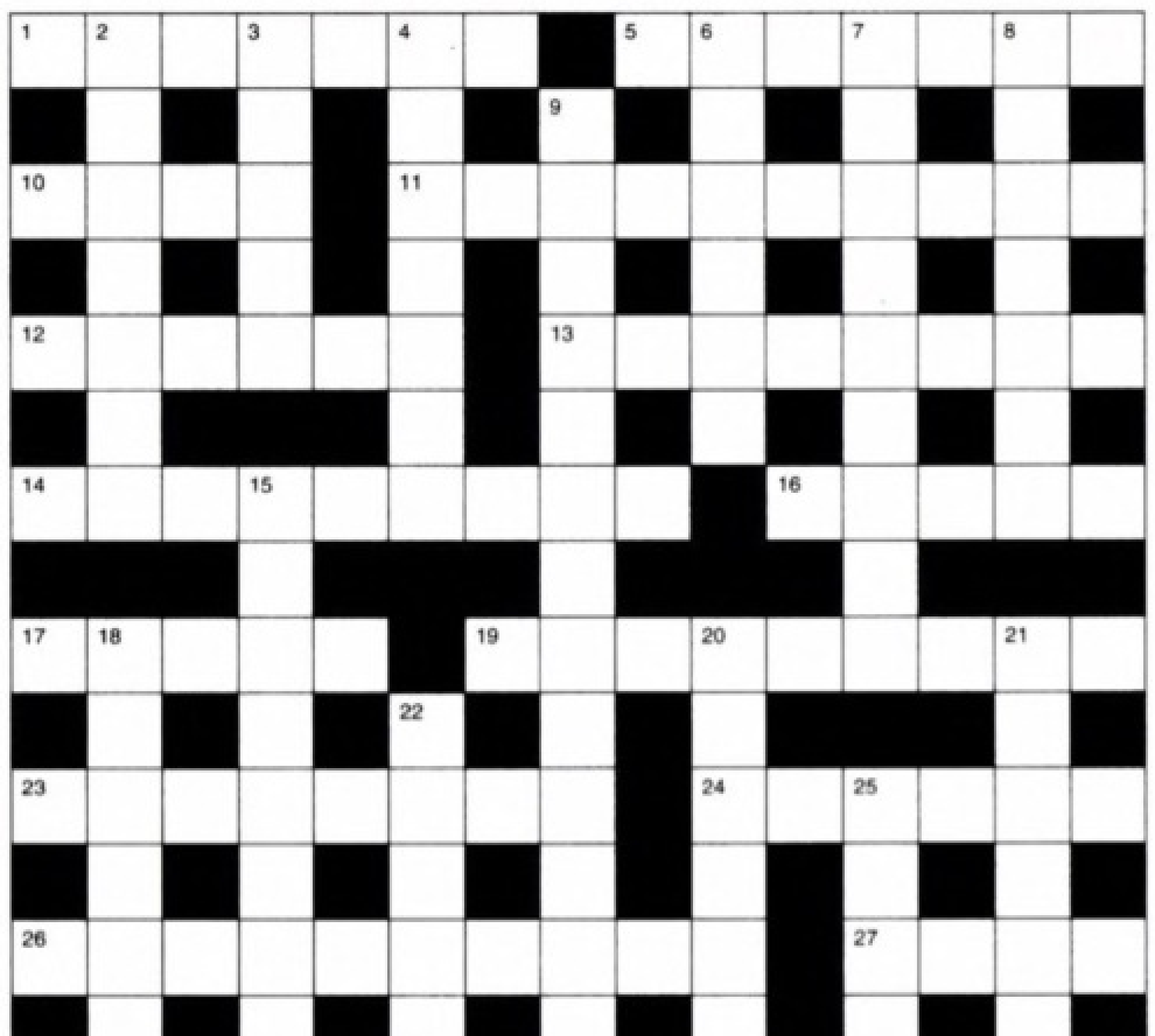
CRYPTIC

Across

- **1,5** King's Head in immaculate pub facelift – the 1960s anti-colonial type (7,7)
- **10** Pole leads ship to land in the Channel (4)
- **11** Italian oil spill on the tide, tanker half-gone (10)
- **12** Norwegian town of Gunnar – Viking inhabitant (6)
- **13** Gossip about sister and the dubious £100 wrap (8)
- **14** Zesty hoop-play by invertebrates (9)
- **16** It goes round the south then gets – alternatively – called to Japanese city (5)
- **17** Ancient Briton is the first person to view joint, by the sound of it (5)
- **19** Secure family by following the oriental environmental community (9)
- **23** Desert kraal which was haphazardly built during endless hail storm (8)
- **24** Martin is loosely represented by 7 perhaps (and possibly the heart of 21) (6)
- **26** The Maid of Orleans' inner nadir tragically manifests in Arabic peoples (10)
- **27** Article 11 leads in China (4)
- **28** Ascetics come from all directions – no pattern! (7)
- **29** A leader of 7 follows a Scottish pattern (7)

Down

- **2** Native American having a chat over a Hopi character or two (7)
- **3** Commissar – Russian Youth, Kremlin Order – initially give the Volga leadership (5)
- **4** Guinea – capital about which declining Nigerian city gets report (7)
- **6** More idealistic nationalism? (6)
- **7** Chinese backlash within cells of loyalists (9)
- **8** Bohemian makes note on scruffy intake (7)
- **9** Cartier style embracing Royal and Ancient president (7,6)
- **15** See 25
- **18** Meat the firm retains is for leather (7)
- **20** Bird reaches water in Wales (7)
- **21** Meatier alternative for Gulf state (7)
- **22** Creatures appear strong over a United Nations article on this point (6)
- **25,15** State kitchen utensil stock in the Amarillo area (5,9)



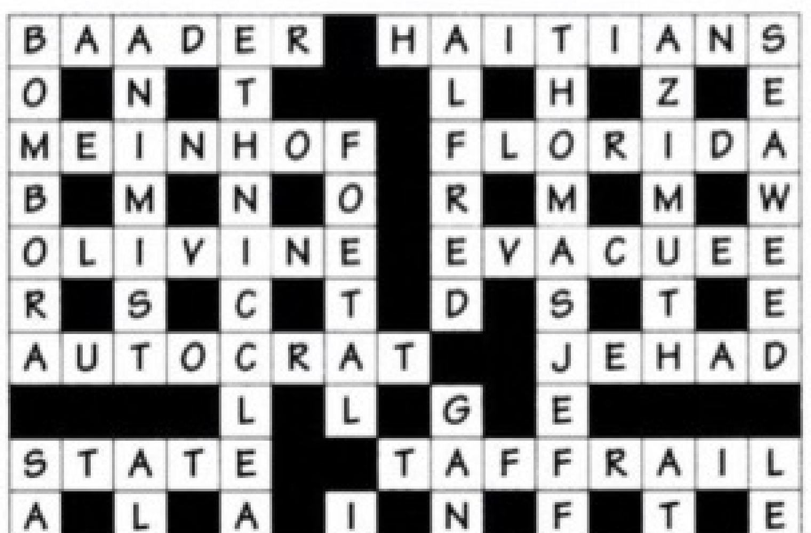
QUICK

Across

- **1,5** First Prime Minister of the independent former Belgian Congo (1960) (7,7)
- **10** One of the Channel Islands (4)
- **11** Citizen of Italian city, and Kingdom until 1860 (10)
- **12** Site of two sea battles in April 1940, after Germany invaded Norway (6)
- **13** Rumourmonger – Latin 'what now?' (8)
- **14** Animal-like plants or plant-like animals (9)
- **16** Japan's third city, (pop 2.7 m) (5)
- **17** British tribe led in the 1st Century AD by Boudicca (5)
- **19** Unit consisting of a community of organisms and their environment (9)
- **23** Arid plateau of southern Africa – the only permanent river is the Okavango (8)
- **24** One of Northern Ireland's six counties (6)
- **26** Inhabitants of the 'Hashemite Kingdom' (10)
- **27** Chinese city of 3m, capital of Shaanxi province (4)
- **28** Members of ancient Jewish sect known for their asceticism (7)
- **29** Scottish industrial town famous for its woven shawls (7)

Down

- **2** Native American tribe of the prairies speaking an Uto-Aztecan language (7)
- **3** The 2nd Commissar of the People's Council (1924-30), between Lenin and Molotov (5)
- **4** Capital of Guinea, established by the French in 1887 (7)
- **6** Imaginary state created by Thomas More's satire of 1516 (6)
- **7** US federalists in the Civil War – or opponents of Irish Home Rule (9)
- **8** Arty proponent of the '50's 'Beat Generation' (7)
- **9** French Prime Minister, 1974-76 and 1986-88 (7,6)
- **15** See 25
- **18** Goat-like antelope of the Alps (7)
- **20** Welsh city, 'Abertawe' (7)
- **21** The jurisdiction of a descendant of Fatima, the daughter of Mohammed (7)
- **22** Lists of animals (6)
- **25,15** Piece of land sandwiched between New Mexico and Oklahoma (5,9)



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Mischief and the Trojan truck

NATO jets may be able to fly low over Innu hunting grounds in northeastern Canada, but they're ill-prepared for limp sedition. **Kari Reynolds** catches them out.

ELIZABETH PENASHUE sat me down at her kitchen table and said: 'We're having a protest at the military base tomorrow. Are you coming?'

Funny how things just seem to come right out of the blue like that around here. One of the misconceptions about 'Indian Time' is that First Nations people (such as Elizabeth) do things at a slower pace than white people (such as myself). I hestitated.

'Do you support the Innu people?' she asked.

'Of course!' I replied. Satisfied, Elizabeth got up and started skinning a beaver.

Did I really think it was that simple? No, I did not. My big-city notions about 'process', which strive vainly to ensure comfort and predictability, suddenly seemed outlandish.

There was no doubt that Innu would be arrested, as they had been many times at the Goose Bay base, ever since its encroachment politicized them. Despite the stress of being jailed, often far from their homes and families, they were prepared to risk it again. On this occasion it was to protest a visit by the Dutch Minister of 'Defence', whose mission was to negotiate a second ten-year military contract with Canada.

The threat to international security, disguised as a mound of giggling garbage, pressed on

Most Canadians are unaware how much their membership of the NATO military alliance costs the peaceful Innu. Nitassinan, the land that gave life to these traditionally nomadic hunters and gatherers – and to the wildlife they depend on – was usurped by Canada a generation ago, and offered to NATO allies for war games.

The following day the Innu Nation office was affable mayhem. Outside, people gathered on the porch, leaned against their trucks, talked, laughed and smoked. Inside, the phones rang, the fax machine buzzed, adults made protest signs and kids ran around, eating snacks and making last-minute trips to the washroom.

I asked how so many people would fit into so few trucks. The response was a standard one; a shrug and 'Don't worry. Be happy.' Then the village garbage truck pulled up, empty. Some kind soul had the foresight to clean it thoroughly beforehand, and we all climbed into its box-like sanctum.

Once settled in, a young woman named Bernadine introduced herself and told me the names of our garbage-truck mates, including the babies. The drive was a 45-minute bump and grind over the road from the village to Goose Bay. As we drew nearer the faces of the elders revealed anxiety and grim determination.

When our truck approached the main gate at the base we hid ourselves under a large orange tarpaulin. The guard must have waved us through, seeing nothing amiss. The threat to international security, disguised as a mound of giggling garbage, pressed on. The truck wound its way through the base until it reached a locked gate by the Dutch jet hangar. The driver broke the chain on the lock with bolt-cutters, then inched the truck forward into the open gate to prevent its closing.

One of the last to leap out, I watched as everybody ran across the tarmac towards a formation of nasty-looking F16 fighter-bomber jets. What were once berry-picking grounds had been paved into oblivion. I grabbed some signs and followed.

Innu gathered around the nearest jet and unfurled a banner. I took photos, then looked around to see if the Dutch military cops were coming. Uniformed men, a short distance away, just stood and watched us. Perhaps, being military types, they couldn't move a muscle without orders from the brass upstairs.

The Innu Nation President climbed into the cockpit of an F16 and made gestures. I'm sure I felt a shudder from the soldiers on the sidelines. After posing for me in front of the jet, everyone suddenly turned and dived underneath it. With a glance over my shoulder I saw the soldiers moving in, so I ran and nestled under the jet with the others. A film I'd removed from my camera was passed around until it ended up safely hidden in a child's pants.

'Excuse me, but would you like to give me your camera?' said a polite voice with a thick Dutch accent behind me.

Still struggling to insert a new film, I thanked the voice and said I'd rather hang onto it.

After a pause the voice asked if I would kindly come with him. I declined the offer, stating my preference to stay with my friends.

One by one we were dragged, our bodies seditiously limp, into buses and jeeps. We cheered as some children broke loose and frolicked in the distance, a portly cop in sweaty pursuit. Finally assembled, we were driven to the Goose Bay jail, greeted by Innu relatives and filmed by media cameras as we were dragged inside.

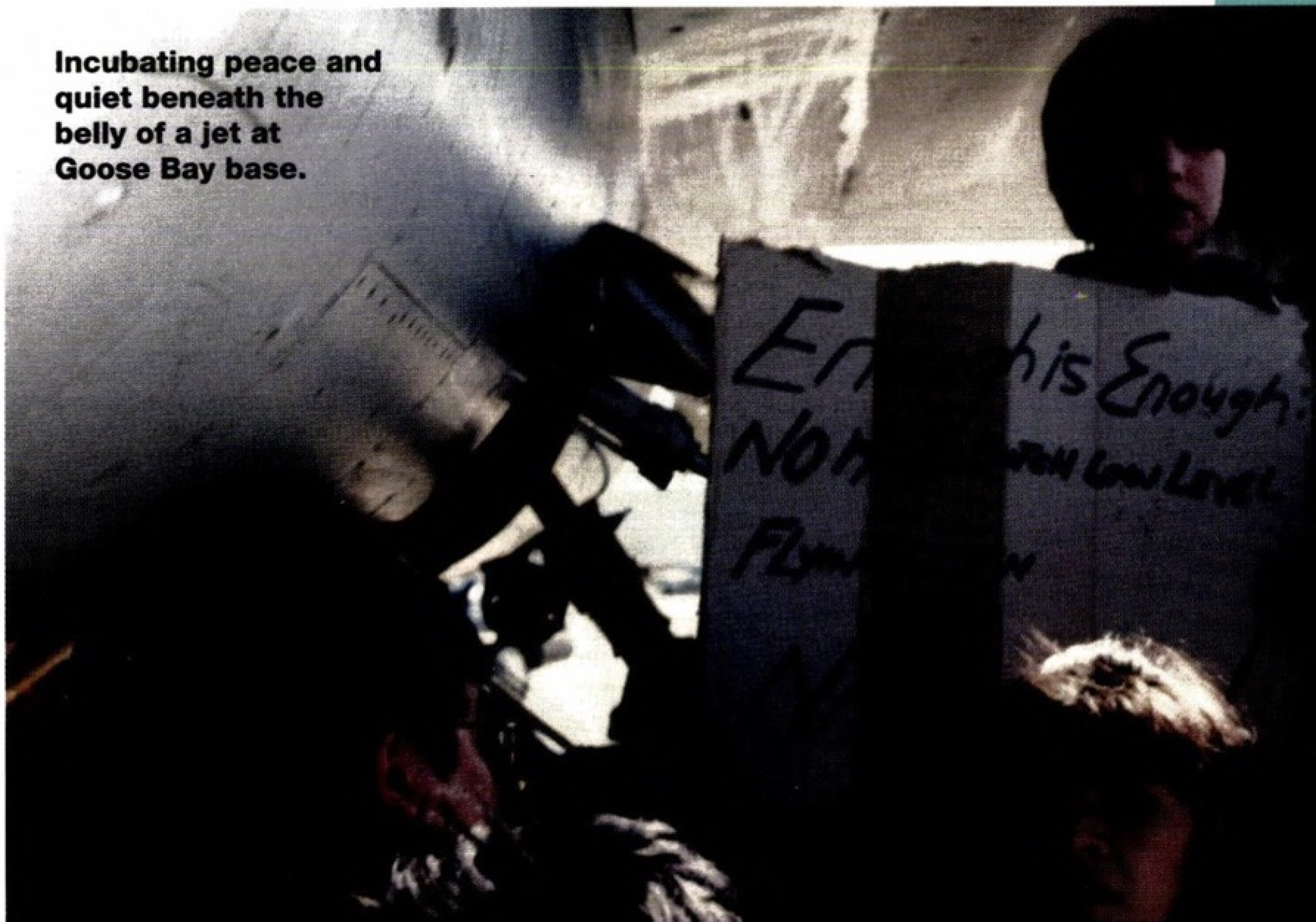
The jail consisted of two small cells, or 'drunk tanks'. Fifteen men were dumped into one of them, while the other was filled to the brim with 21 women, including myself, plus children who refused to be parted from their mothers and aunties.

It was immoderately cosy in the windowless lock-up. When the only seat – a toilet – was needed for its intended purpose a merry shuffle around the cell ensued.

One at a time we were questioned and photographed for 'mug shots'. Charged with 'criminal mischief', we signed notices for future court dates. In time we paid our debt to society, serving the sentences that are meted out to the criminally mischievous.

In the name of peace, I would do it all again. ■

Kari Reynolds is an unrepentant peacenik in Toronto, Canada.



Incubating peace and quiet beneath the belly of a jet at Goose Bay base.

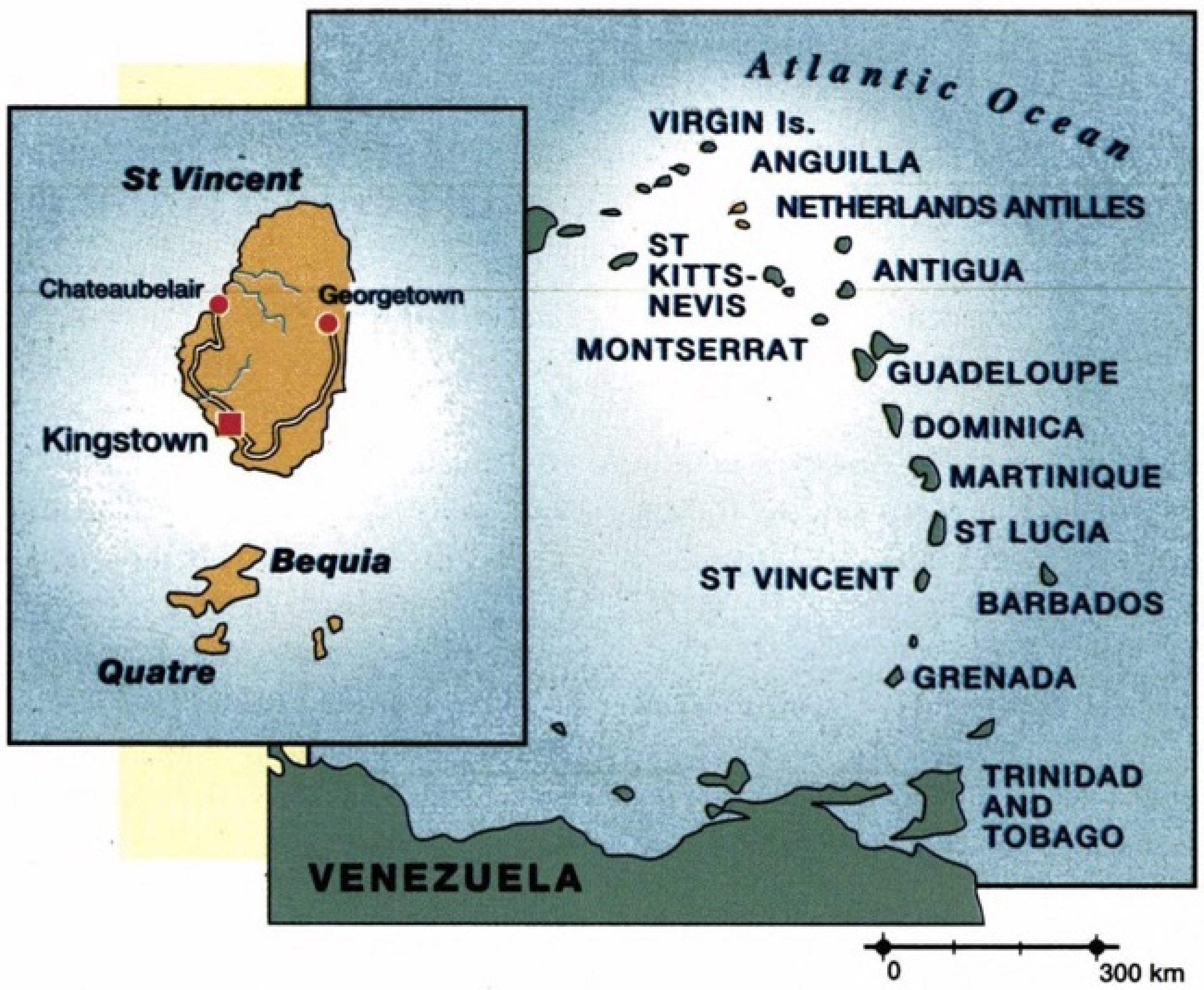
KARI REYNOLDS

Country profile

St Vincent & the Grenadines

HALF-WAY up the wild and scenic east coast of St Vincent lies Georgetown, once the bustling centre of the island's sugar industry. Today it is a deserted and melancholic place. Georgetown's prosperity disappeared overnight when the Government closed its sugar mill in 1972 and nothing has come to wake it from its torpor since.

Further up the coast are some of the island's poorest villages. These remote settlements are home to the so-called Black Caribs, a community descended from a mix of the island's indigenous people and African slaves. In the eighteenth century the Black Caribs were a fearsome fighting force, harrying the British colonial forces and allying themselves with French revolutionaries from nearby Guadeloupe until they were defeated and deported *en masse* to the Honduran island of Roatán in 1797. The few isolated communities which remain are a poignant reminder of when European powers fought over the riches of the 'sugar islands'.



ITEM WORLD GUIDE 1996/97

The poverty of the east coast is a different world from the exclusive millionaire lifestyles to be found in the paradisical Grenadines, an arc of coral islands stretching to the south of St Vincent. In Bequia, Mayreau and Mustique the jet set relaxes on privately-owned islands or hires luxury yachts complete with local crews. Princess Margaret and Mick Jagger are two of the better-known regulars in Mustique, a six-square-mile tropical hideaway on which locals were until recently forbidden to give birth or be buried.

The contrast between rural hardship and enclave tourism has marked St Vincent's recent history and is liable to become more marked as the banana industry – the main island's economic lifeblood – enters a new crisis. The 1997 ruling by the World Trade Organization (WTO) that the European Union unfairly favours banana exports from ex-colonies like St Vincent means that the island will have to compete in a free market with large-scale, modernized producers such as Colombia or Costa Rica.

The National Farmers' Union talks of the need to diversify and hopes that 'fairly traded' bananas from St Vincent can attract a niche market in Europe. Other options are few and far between. The island is the world's leading producer of arrowroot, but this can only be cultivated on flat land. Urban unemployment is depressingly high at 30 per cent.

Under the leadership of veteran Prime Minister, Sir James 'Son' Mitchell, St Vincent & the Grenadines has adopted some unusual economic strategies to survive the harsh climate of the 1990s. The country is a major flag of convenience for international shipping and picked up many formerly Croatian-registered vessels during the Yugoslav conflict. Its new fish market, known as 'Little Tokyo', was a gift from the Japanese Government in return, say cynics, for St Vincent's supporting vote on whale-fishing quotas in international fora. There are even dark rumours about alleged Mafia involvement in tourist developments in the Grenadines.

Yet little has been proved, and 'Son' Mitchell has ruled for much of the last 30 years. Whether even he, however, can steer St Vincent through the impending banana crisis remains to be seen, and there are many who remember that it was he who closed the ailing Georgetown sugar mill and started the town's irreversible decline. ■

James Ferguson

AT A GLANCE

MICHAEL GUNTHER / STILL PICTURES

Leader: Prime Minister James Mitchell

Economy: GNP per capita $2,517 (UK $18,340).

Monetary unit: Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC$2.7 = US$1).

Main exports: bananas, arrowroot, garments.

Main imports: foodstuffs, machinery, oil.

Tourism earns about $60 million annually, approximately half the value of exports.

People: 110,000

Health: Infant mortality 19 per 1,000 live births (US 8 per 1,000). St Vincent has a network of rural clinics and has done much to reduce infectious diseases, although facilities are mostly based in Kingstown.

Culture: After decades of resistance on the part of the indigenous Caribs and conflict with France, Britain finally claimed St Vincent in 1783. The 'Black Caribs' are a minority community, and most Vincentians are descended from African slaves imported in the 18th and 19th centuries. Ties with Britain remain, but most migrating Vincentians opt for the US.

Religion: Mostly Anglican, about 20% Roman Catholic

Language: English

NI star rating

EXCELLENT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
FAIR	★★★
POOR	★★
APPALLING	★

Sources: UNDP, *Human Development Report 1997*; Caribbean Development Bank; *Caribbean Insight*; World Bank, *World Development Report 1997*.

Not previously profiled

STAR RATINGS

INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★★
Relatively prosperous farmers, but some serious poverty and unemployment. Luxury tourism is the preserve of a small local élite.

SELF-RELIANCE ★★
Agriculture is export-oriented, and many basic foods are imported. Imports nearly all its energy requirements.

POSITION OF WOMEN ★★★
Women have access to education and are well-represented in commerce, even if politics are highly male-dominated.

LITERACY ★★★★
85 per cent and rising; education system receives adequate Government support, with an emphasis on primary schooling.

FREEDOM ★★★★
Elections are free and fair, and there is an outspoken press which enjoys freedoms despite occasional Government pressure.

LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★★★
73 years, a good average for a country relatively poor by eastern Caribbean standards.

POLITICS

NI ASSESSMENT ★★★
James Mitchell's New Democratic Party has dominated island politics since the 1980s, largely because of the opposition's weakness and squabbling. Politicians in the Grenadines occasionally threaten secession, but most Vincentians favour the existing links with the smaller islands.

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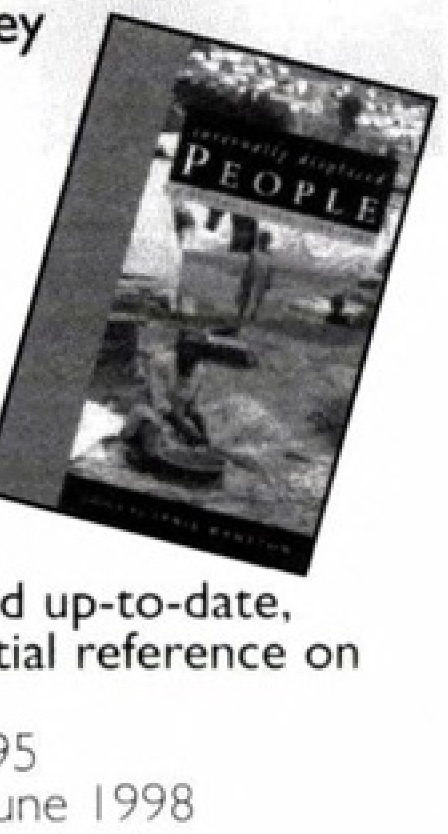

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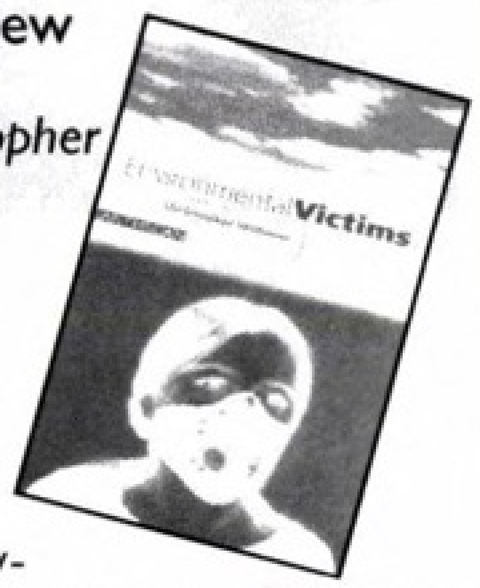

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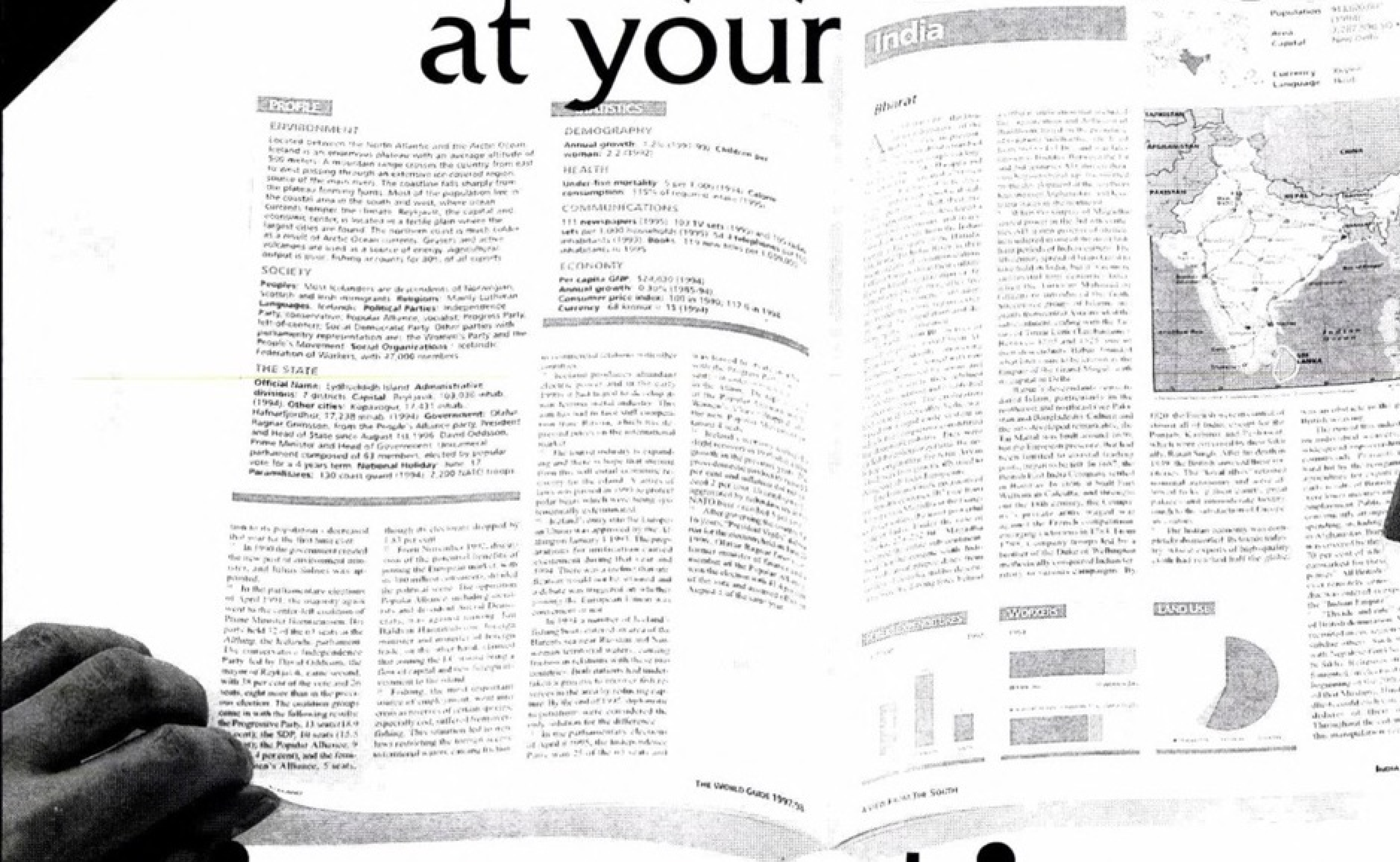
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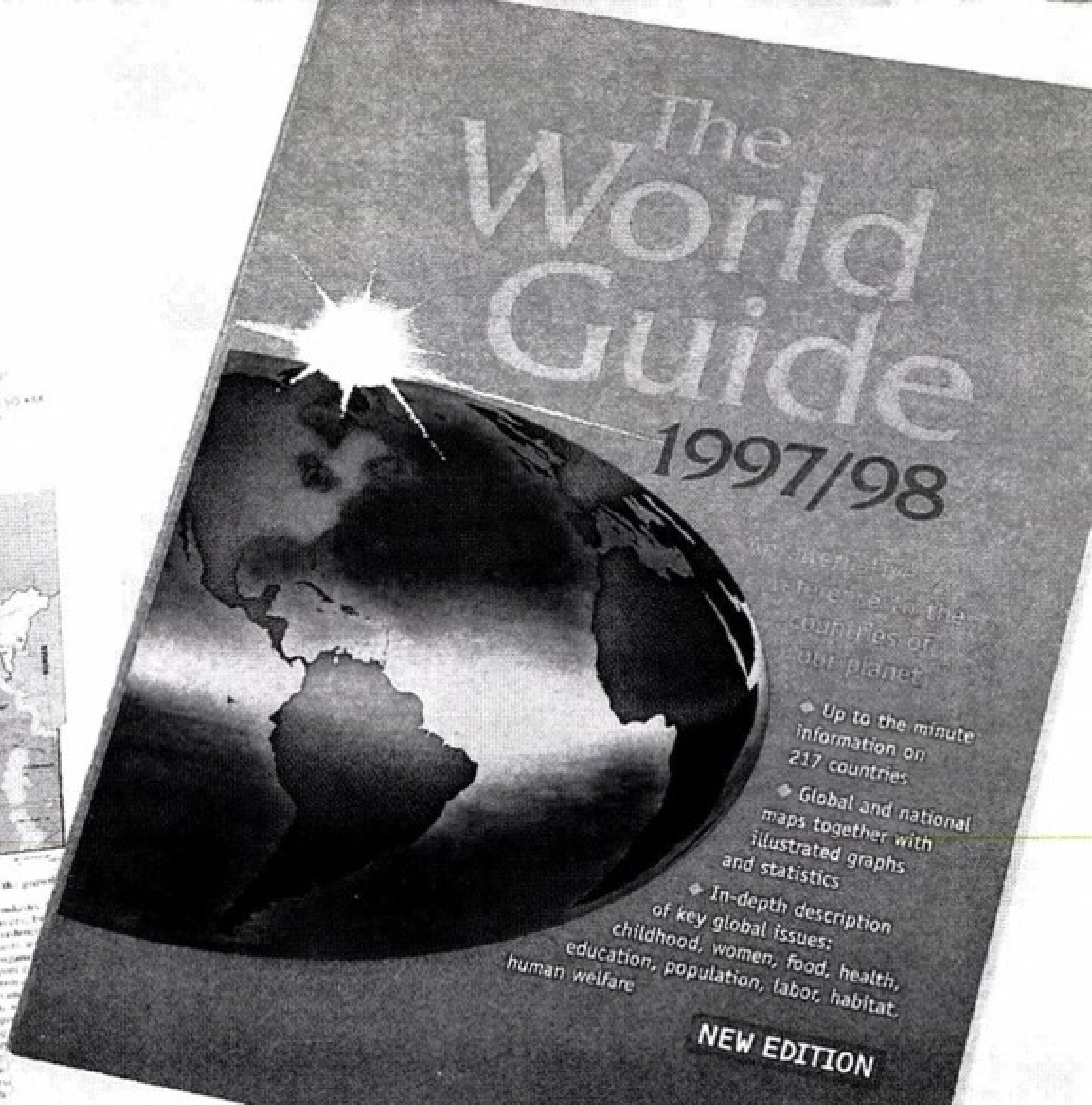
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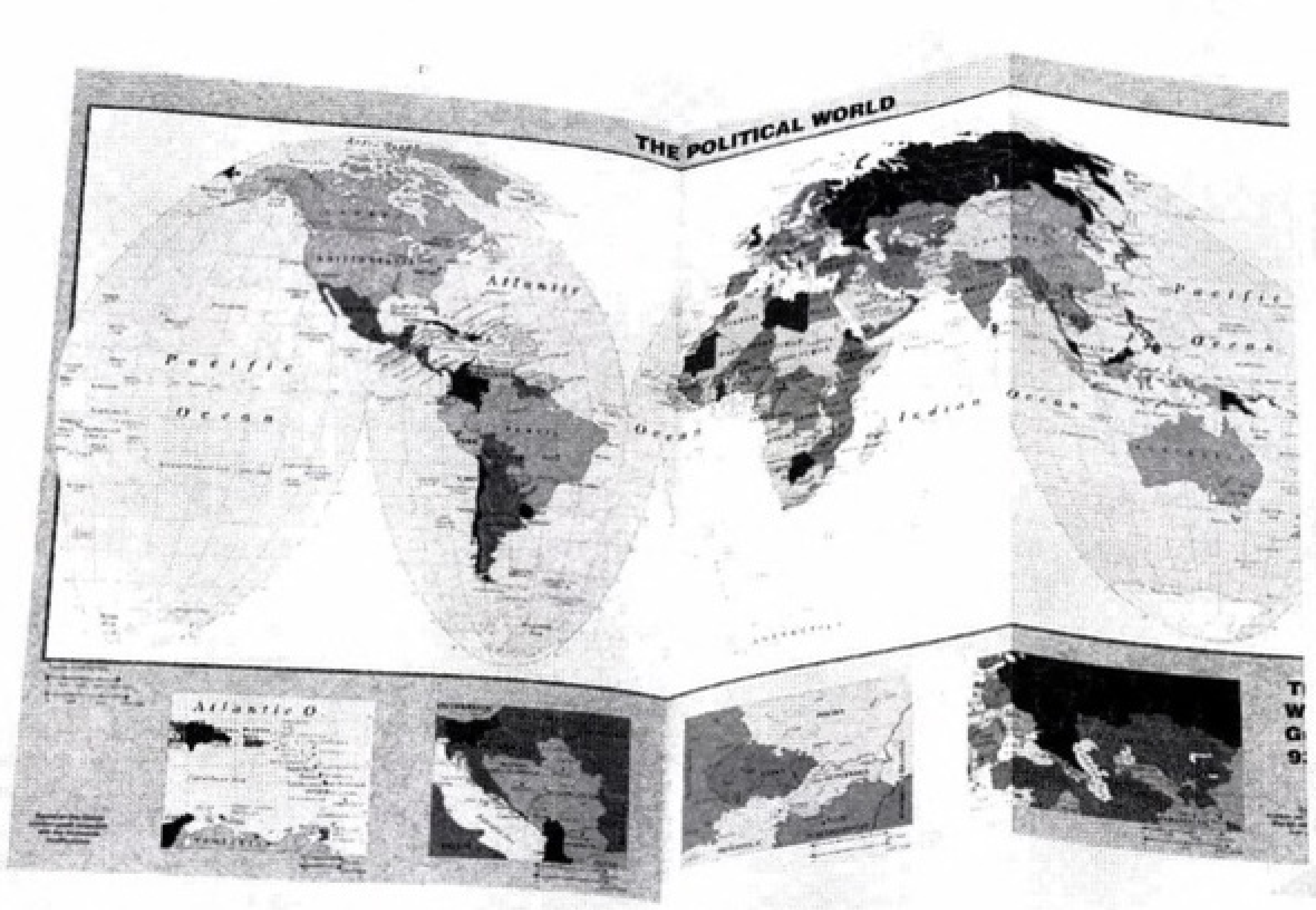
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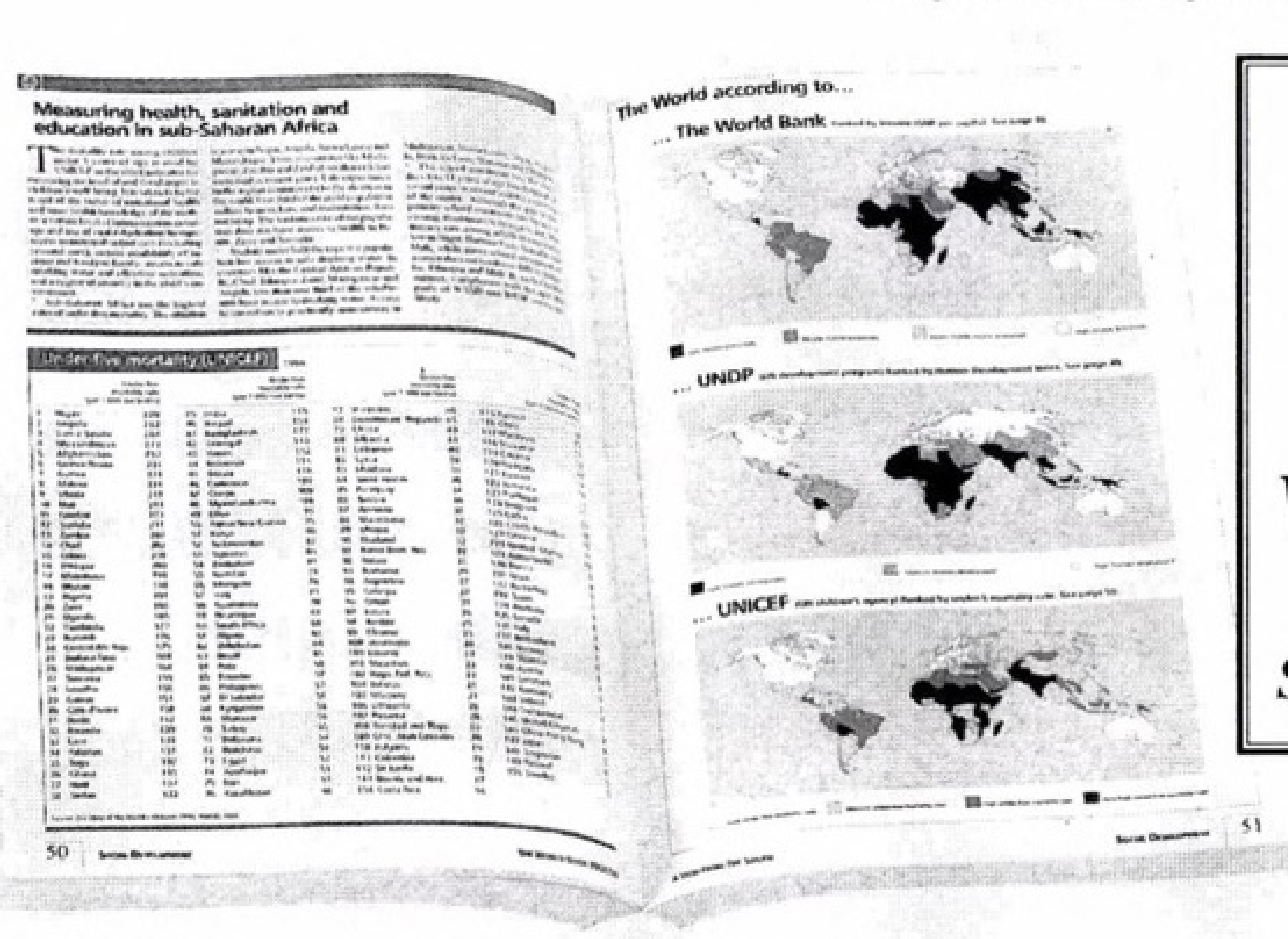
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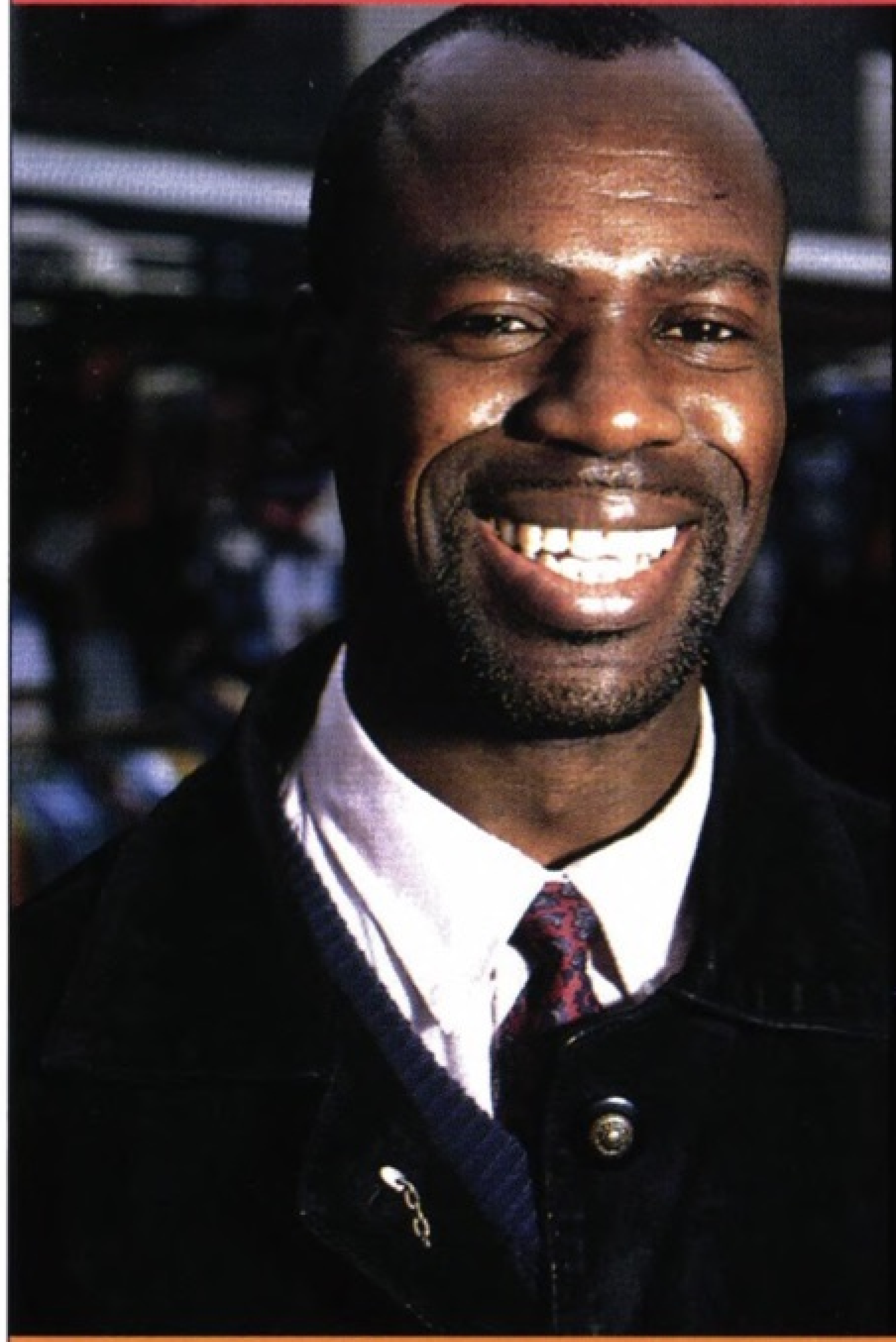

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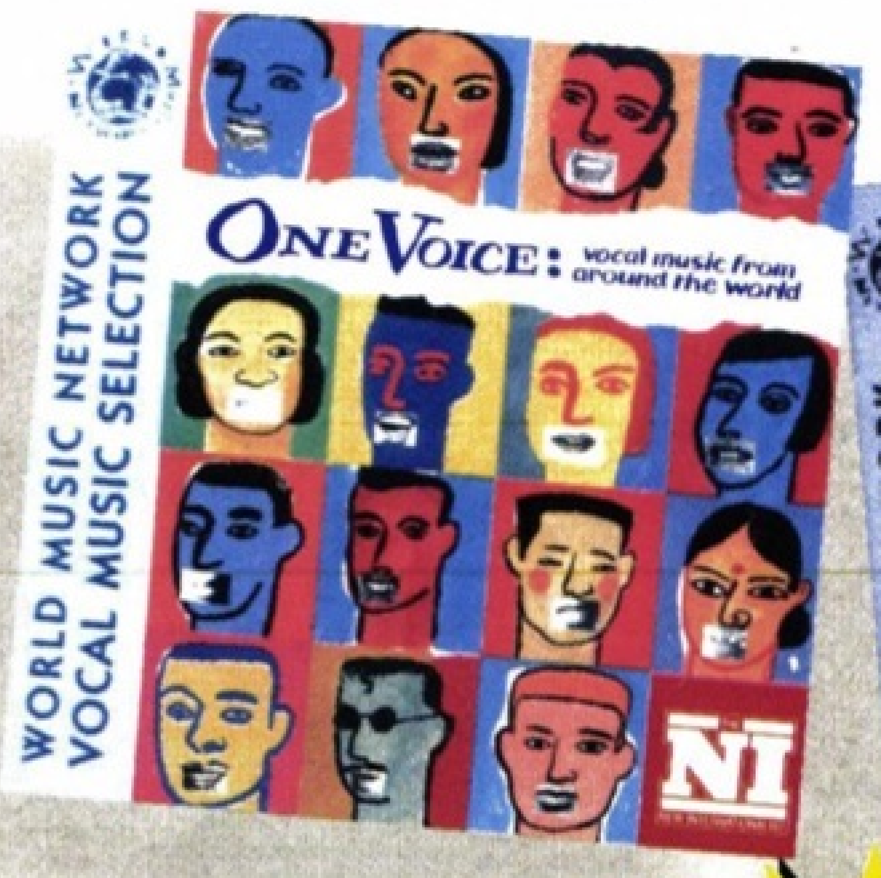
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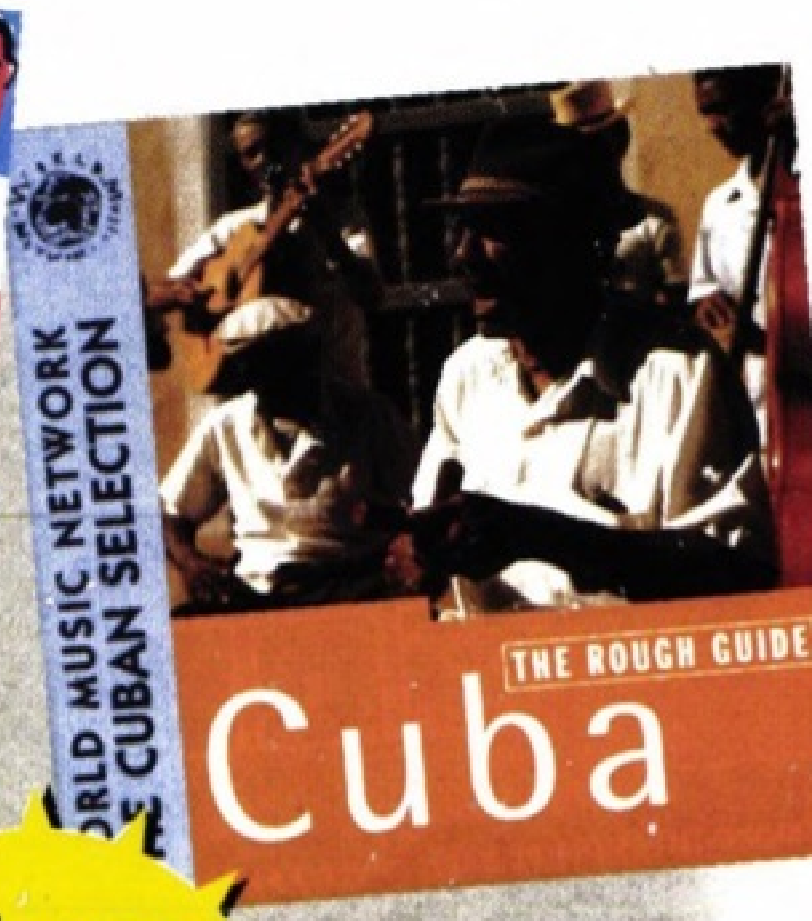
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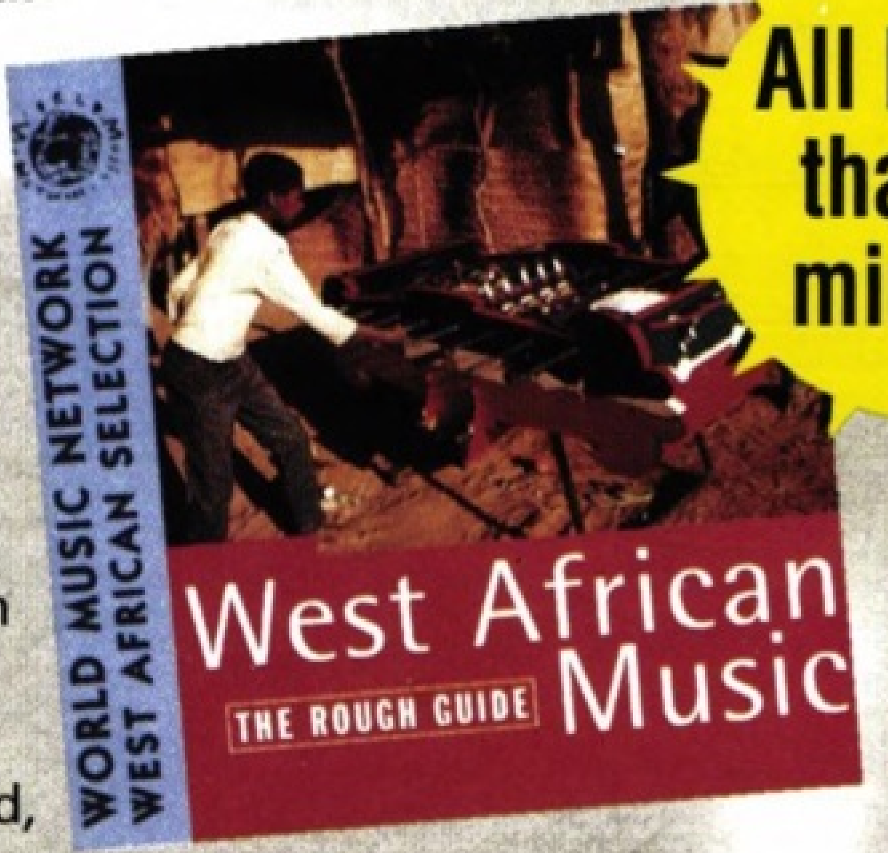
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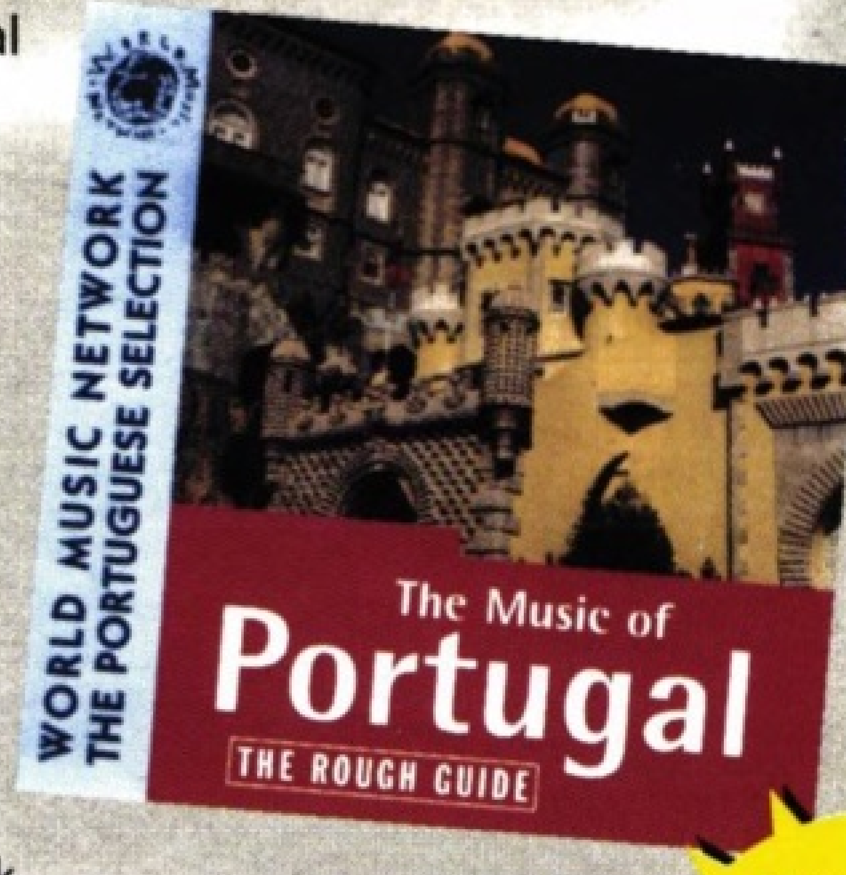
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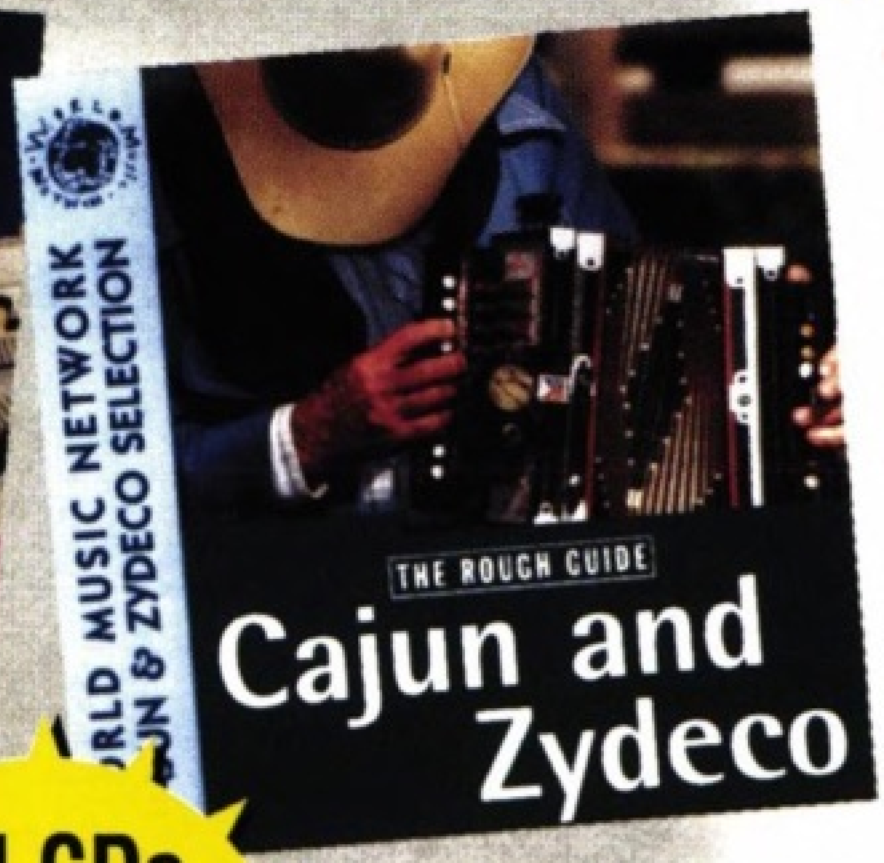
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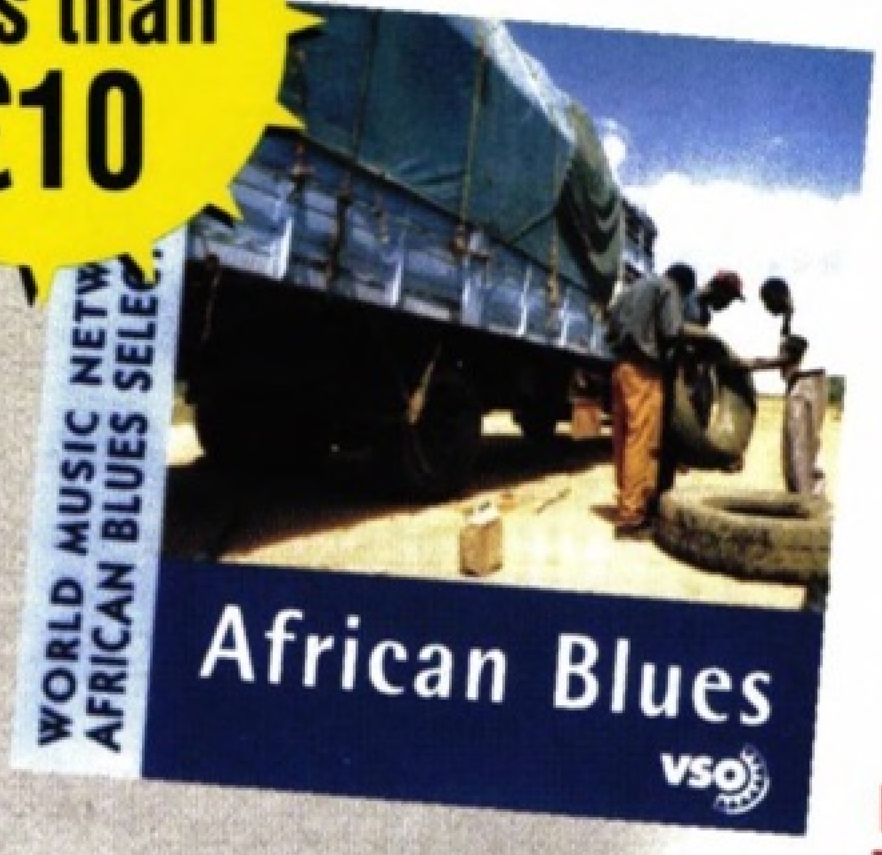
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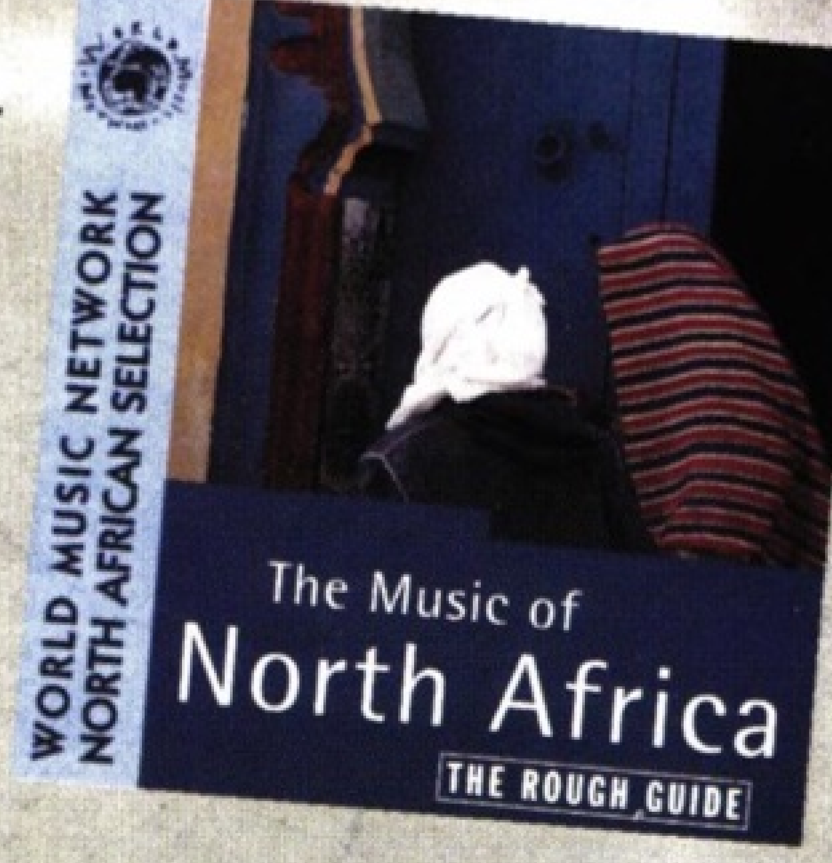
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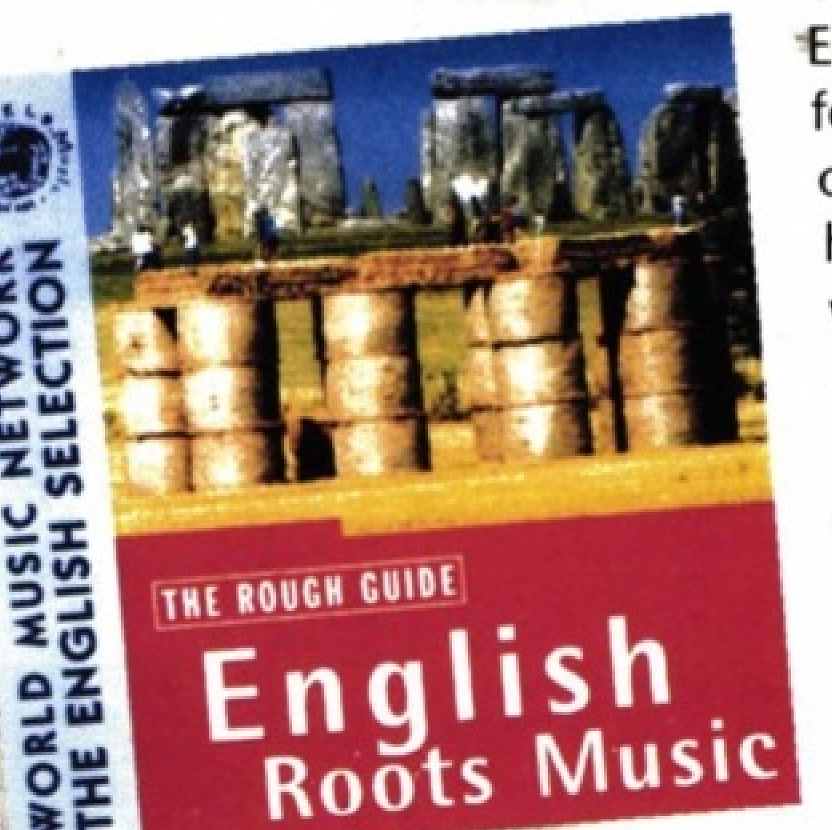
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THE ROUGH GUIDE
English Roots Music

Cuba - The Rough Guide

Cuba, an island shaped by revolution, is a treasure chest of musical styles and influences. Music is Cuba's greatest export and this album features styles from danzon, son, guaracha, Afro-Cuban jazz, and musica campesina represented by its queen, Celina Gonzalez. Other featured artists include Orquesta Riverside, Sierra Maestra, Los Van Van and Nico Saquito.

Brazil - The Rough Guide

From the spirit of the carnival to soulful instrumentalists to soaring vocals; from the bossa nova to the samba, this album celebrates the variety of Brazilian music. Tracks include Marlui Miranda and Uakti with music from Brazil's indigenous peoples, the viola of Paulo Freire and the electric berimbau of Dinho Nascimento.

Cajun & Zydeco - The Rough Guide

These 19 tracks of infectious dance music from Louisiana are guaranteed to get everyone off their seat. Cajun music features the intricate guitar-playing of David Doucet and the progressive sounds of Beausoleil. Examples of Zydeco come from the highly successful group, Buckwheat Zydeco, and the legendary accordion playing of Clifton Chenier.

African Blues

This album is simply a stunning collection of songs from Africa. The roots of the blues? Find out for yourself - and know that the blues is alive and well in Africa. Featuring Oumou Sangare, Ali Farka Touré, Stella Chiweshe, the Super Rail Band and many others, this compilation is music at its purest. Compiled for Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)

English Roots - The Rough Guide

Over the past 30 years music from England has won an international following but traditional music has often been overlooked. This album highlights the many talented artists who have resurrected classic English songs and brought the folk tradition to bear on modern society. Featured artists include June Tabor, Eliza Carthy and John Kirkpatrick plus several archive tracks.

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